

魔王の 戦姫

ヴァナディース

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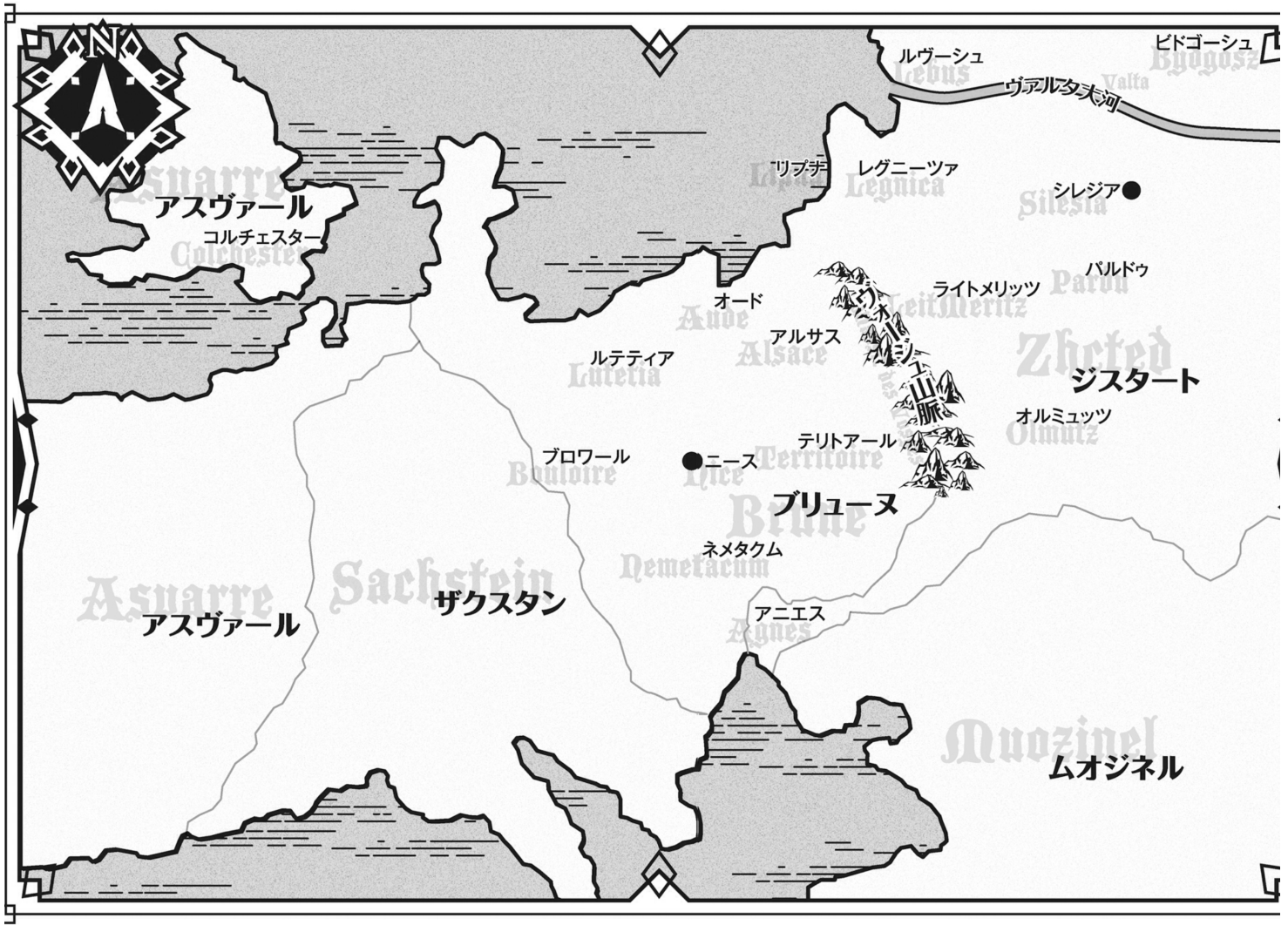
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✿ リュミラ=ルリエ ✿

七戦姫のひとり。十八歳。愛称はミラ。ジスタート王国の南にあるオルミュツを治めている。竜具は槍の“凍結”ラヴィアス。エレンとは大狼の仲。

✿ ソフィーヤ=オベルタス ✿

七戦姫のひとり。二十二歳。愛称はソフィー。ジスタート王国の南東にあるポリーシャを治めている。竜具は鎧の“光華”ザート。外交に長ける。

✿ アレクサンドラ=アルシャーヴィン ✿

七戦姫のひとりだった。オルシーナ海戦の後、病で命を落とす。愛称はサーシャ。竜具は双剣の“煌炎”バルグレン。

✿ エリザヴェータ=フォミナ ✿

七戦姫のひとり。十九歳。ジスタート王国の北西にあるルグーシュを治めている。竜具は鞭の“雷渦”ヴァリツァイフ。『異彩虹蔵』の持ち主。記憶を失ったティグルを重用し、そばに置いていた。

✿ オルガ=タム ✿

七戦姫のひとり。十五歳。ジスタート王国の東にあるプレストを治めている。竜具は斧の“羅轟”ムマ。アスヴァールでティグルと行動をともにした。

✿ ヴァレンティナ=グリンカ=エステス ✿

七戦姫のひとり。二十三歳。ジスタート王国の北東にあるオステロードを治めている。竜具は大鎌の“虚影”エザンディス。

✿ レギン ✿

ブリュース王国の女王。十七歳。亡き父に代わり、ブリュース王国を治めている。ティグルを慕っている。

✿ マスハス=ローダント ✿

ブリュース王国の伯爵。ティグルの父ウルスの親友で、彼の死後、ティグルの世話を何くれとなく焼いている。現在は、旧友である宰相のボードワンと共にレギンを補佐する。

✿ タラド=グラム ✿

アスヴァール王国の若き将軍。二十七歳。王になる野望を抱いている。

✿ フィグネリア ✿

双剣の竜具“煌炎”バルグレンによってレグニーツァを治める新たな戦姫に選ばれた女傭兵。二十五歳。過去にエレンと因縁を持つ。

✿ レオンハルト=フォン=シュミット ✿

ザクスタン王国の将軍。四十三歳。五万の騎兵を率って、ブリュース王国に侵攻した。『稲妻のレオンハルト』の異名を持つ。

✿ メリザンド ✿

テナルディエ公爵の未亡人であり、レギンの従姉。レギンの統治を快く思わず、彼女を排除しようと陰謀をめぐらせる。

✿ ガスロン ✿

ブリュース王国の公爵。ブリュース内乱の際に行方不明となり、世間的には死亡したと思われている。魔物を喰らう能力を持つ。

✿ グレアスト ✿

ガスロンの腹心。ブリュース王国を混乱に陥れるべく暗躍している。

✿ 登場人物紹介 ✿

✿ ティグル=ヴルムド=ヴォルン ✿

本編の主人公。十八歳。愛称はティグル。ブリュース王国の伯爵。ザクスタン王国侵攻の知らせを受け、ブリュース王国へ帰還した。『月光の騎士軍』を編成し、総指揮官を務める。



✿ エレオノーラ=ヴィルターリア ✿

七戦姫のひとり。十八歳。愛称はエレン。ジスタート王国の南西にあるライトメリツツを治めている。竜具は長剣の“銀閃”アリファール。



✿ リムアリーシャ ✿

エレンの副官で、昔からの親友でもある。二十一歳。愛称はリム。



✿ ティッタ ✿

ティグルに仕える侍女。十七歳。ティグルに従って月光の騎士軍に身を置く。

Prologue

Wind containing the smell of blood blew violently.

This was a battlefield. More exactly, it was a corner of the battlefield. The fellow mercenary groups hired by both armies clashed and it was slightly before one of the armies collapsed.

It was the side that Figneria has been hired by, that lost.

The enemy ran after her allies who fled and her allies dispersed. When she noticed, there was no longer an ally around Figneria, but only several enemies chasing after her.

As she ran, she cut down the enemies one after another and at the place where there remained two enemies, Figneria finally stopped running away.

One of them was a tall man who wore leather armor and set up a double-edged ax. The other was a thin man who wore chain mail and held a spear.

Figneria lowered her head dodging the axe swung down sideways as if going against the wind. She kicked the ground, jumped into the tall man's chest and sharply slashed at him with the short swords which she respectively held in both hands.

A short scream was raised. As his right hand and his abdomen, which was not covered with leather armor, was dyed with blood; the tall man staggered. Figneria took another step forward and slid the short swords' blades into the tall man's throat. The tall man coughed vomiting blood, rolled on the ground and stopped moving before long.

The man with the spear stood stock still in utter amazement. While he was at a loss on how to attack, his comrade was killed. It was no wonder.

Figneria did not overlook that chance. Originally, she was aiming for the tall man first in order to seal the attack of the man with the spear by using the tall

man's large build as a shield.

She shortened the interval in one breath. Figneria threw the short sword held in her left hand. As the man reflexively tried to knock down the short sword, he wielded his spear.

When the short sword let a hard metallic sound resound and fell on the ground, Figneria closed in upon the man.

Because the blade couldn't go through the chain mail, she thrust the right hand's short sword to the man's face. With a *kahah!* sound, the man opened his eyes wide and fell down on his back.

Still grasping the short sword smeared with blood and fat, Figneria expressionlessly looked down at the men. When she confirmed that they were certainly dead, she picked up the other short sword and looked around.

The sky was dark as it was covered with dark gray thick clouds. The ground was filled with dozens of corpses. Equipment only for mercenaries were scattered around; and if there were corpses wearing leather armor, there were also corpses wearing armor and helmets.

“—What an awful battle.”

Being addressed to by a voice from the side, Figneria reflexively jumped back from there while wielding her short swords. When looking at the direction of the voice, one man stood there.

He was around 30. He had a medium build and held a sword in his hand. The armor which he wore was dirty with blood and mud. The white scar on his left cheek was conspicuous, but more than that, it was a man whose calm smile was unbecoming to a battlefield.

“From which side were you hired?”

While asking in a tone as if chatting with a friend, the man lowered his sword. It was to tell that he had no hostility. Figneria, not releasing her vigilance, gave a short reply while measuring by eye the distance to the man. The man leaked a sigh of relief.

“In that case, why don't we escape together? This seems to be a lost battle.”

Figneria did not reply immediately and turned her gaze to the distance.

The two armies were fighting intensely. The sounds of roars, screams, iron clashing with iron and the sound of flesh being smashed were mixed; and great noise peculiar to a battlefield could be heard up to here.

As the man said, being pushed back was the side which hired Figneria.

When mercenaries of a defeated army were caught, being sold off to slave merchants was still good. In most cases, even such a trouble was spared and they were killed on the spot. Because Figneria was a woman, she would probably have a ghastlier experience.

Still away from the man, Figneria asked.

“Do you have other comrades?”

“Yes. I’ve already let the ones I found go ahead. I also came here just in case, but.....”

The man revealed a wry face. Standing here was only Figneria. The man had no room to check the corpses one by one to see whether there were his comrades.

Figneria hesitated on whether she should trust the man. She has never belonged to any mercenary groups so far. Be it a gained battle or a lost battle, she has always left the battlefield alone.

“—Let’s go.”

Suddenly, the man turned his back and began to run. Although Figneria hasn’t yet given an answer, she started running led by the man’s movement.

One enemy cavalryman came chasing after Figneria and the man, but the two of them easily killed the cavalryman.

They then took his horse and left the battlefield.

The man’s name was Vissarion. He was the leader of a mercenary group called the “Silver Gale”.

“Leader, were you hanging around the battlefield to look for your

subordinates?”

When Figneria looked at Vissarion with an amazed face, the mercenary group's leader greatly nodded with a carefree smile.

“It's my way of doing things. We're not that many after all.”

Figneria was currently in the camp of the “Silver Gale”. After having succeeded in escaping from the battlefield with Vissarion, she stopped by as she was invited by him. She wanted to know the outcome of the battle, and there was also the need to discuss how they would share the horses which were the only spoils of war.

Although, if one were to ask whether they were able to speak immediately after arriving at the camp, then that was not the case.

It was a lost battle. The small camp was full of injured people. Groans which appeared from pain and wordless screams could be heard here and there.

Women were running about with bandages and wine bottles in hands between men who rounded their back and crouched down or lay down on overcoats spread on the ground.

---Also including those who aren't combatants, they are about a little less than 30 people.

Figneria thought about such a thing while looking at the mercenaries who were receiving treatment. Although of small scale, in order to manage a mercenary group it seemed that necessary personnel were generally gathered.

The fact that women were in a mercenary group was not strange. This was because people doing cooking, laundry, sewing and going shopping in the town were necessary. There was a difference in deftness between a woman, whom housework was incorporated within her daily life as something natural, and a man to whom it wasn't so.

Moreover, they also had the role as harlots. They kept company to hotheaded men; at times they took the role of listeners of their idle complaints or heroic tales, comforted them and they (men) could not be cheered up unless it was a woman.

When about half a koku had passed, the injured people's treatment was almost over and the camp became calm, Figneria noticed multiple gazes turned towards her.

It was not the kind belonging to hostility. A woman mercenary was rare. In addition, Figneria's attire was quite peculiar. She wore black clothes; a sleeveless coat and a skirt reaching up to her feet all coming together. The design of a falcon sewed on her clothes vividly stood out.

There was also the factor of Figneria herself attracting the attention. The curves of her refined body was to the extent that they could even be seen over her clothes, and sex appeal could also be felt from her long black hair which flowed as to cover her left eye.

Even when exposed to inquisitive eyes, Figneria remained composed as she did not move even one eyebrow. She was used to these sorts of stares. But, she only thought that if she was provoked in a strange way, she would hit them hard. Though her short swords were hung to the blue obi wound around her waist, as expected she did not intend to unsheathe them suddenly.

However, the first person to call out to her was someone unexpected.

"Are you a mercenary?"

Being addressed with a child-like voice in which tension, excitement and expectation were mixed, Figneria looked there. She squinted her eyes showing a slight confusion.

Standing there were two children. So, it was natural that it was a child-like voice.

One was indeed a lively girl with silver hair and red eyes. She would be around 10. She wore plain hemp clothes and a short skirt, and she carried a sword on her back.

The other one was a tall girl whom tied her dull blond hair on the left side of her head. She looked to be two or three years older than the silver-haired girl. One wondered whether she was nervous as her expression was stiff. Her blue eyes were not turned towards Figneria, but towards the silver-haired girl.

"Elen. Shouldn't you greet her first? Besides, it's rude to not introduce

yourself.”

To the blond-haired girl’s words, the silver-haired girl called Elen gave a small nod. She then straightened up her back and bowed her head when she once again stared straight at Figneria.

“Nice to meet you, visitor. I am Eleonora. The tall girl here is Limalisha. Errr..... Please to make your acquaintance.”

Figneria, unable to utter her voice at once, looked down at the two children with a bewildered expression. The girl called Limalisha aside, Eleonora — Elen was clearly different. She was too young to be even in charge of odd jobs and it was also strange for her to carry a sword on her back.

“—Thank you for your politeness. I’m Figneria.”

After a short while, Figneria finally returned these words. Perhaps because she was encouraged by the fact that a reply was given, Elen brightened her pair of red pupils and greatly leaned forward.

“Figneria. You’re a mercenary, right? I’m currently an apprentice, but I’ll become a mercenary someday. Please, tell me a story. For example about a mercenary’s rules or how to fight and the like.....”

Figneria was greatly perplexed as she was begged eagerly.

Until now, she had mercilessly knocked down men who had approached her with an ulterior motive and ignored those who turned looks of loathsomeness and contempt at her.

But, this was the first time that she was asked by a child. Unable to ignore it, yet not knowing what to talk about either, Figneria silently looked down at the two girls.

Speaking of Limalisha, she was looking at Elen with a half-amazed expression. It seemed that she didn’t intend to stop Elen unless she did something serious.

“Hey you two, don’t cause trouble for our guest.”

Figneria raised her head to the calm voice. Elen and Lim also looked there.

Vissarion was walking their way. In contrast with Figneria who was inwardly relieved, Elen sulked in displeasure.

“I didn’t cause her trouble. I just want to ask her about various things.....”

“I see. Do it at the next opportunity. I have to talk with her about something important from now, you see. Lim, take her somewhere so that she doesn’t eavesdrop.”

While saying so to Limalisha — Lim, Vissarion told Figneria with a hand gesture to go in the tent. The black-haired female mercenary lightly patted Elen’s head.

“See you next time.”

In that way, after having entered the tent without seeing Elen’s reaction, she slightly regretted having taken an action which wasn’t like her.

Negotiations in themselves were over immediately. They talked and decided on the matter of exchange the horses into money; Figneria received half the amount of the money and the horses themselves became Vissarion’s.

Then, the two of them proceeded with information exchange. They taught each other about things such as where a war looked like it would happen next time, or who were feudal lords giving a good pay. As they finished with that, Figneria suddenly asked Vissarion about what she was concerned about.

“That girl Eleonora, is she your daughter?”

“What are you asking all of a sudden?”

Vissarion stared at Figneria with an amazed face. Although the black-haired woman mercenary felt light irritation in his reaction, she explained about how Elen did not look like someone in charge of miscellaneous jobs and also about how she carried a sword on her back.

“I have never seen a mercenary group employing such a child as an apprentice.”

“Well, that's right.”

Vissarion revealed a wry smile as he scratched his short black hair.

“She may not look like it, but Elen is a veteran. After all, she’s been here since

ten years ago.”

According to Vissarion’s story, it seemed that he picked up Elen when she was a baby ten years ago. Since he hesitated to abandon her, he decided to raise her in the mercenary group.

“Since she has become aware of things around her, maybe it’s due to the fact that she has been surrounded by bad people. It's isn't like she can't do miscellaneous jobs, but she's just naturally a naughty brat who swing a sword around.”

Although he said naughty kid, there was certain affection for Elen in Vissarion’s voice. He was proud of being her foster parent, and there was no room to doubt the fact that he felt joy about it.

It was a story of when Figneria was 18 years old and Elen was 10 years old.

Afterwards, Figneria wandered from battlefield to battlefield alone without belonging to any mercenary group. Her blades increased in sharpness with each battle and she killed well-known mercenaries and knights one after another.

Before she knew, she came to be called by the nickname “Finé of the War Blade”.

She had the opportunity to meet the “Silver Gale” several times; she had helped them with their work and had also been helped by them. Vissarion was the owner of superior ability both as the leader of a mercenary group or as a warrior, and he was also deeply trusted by the people of the mercenary group.

Figneria strangely got along well with him too, and their relationship became to the extent that they threw jokes at each other while drinking alcohol together; but she did not become a member of the “Silver Gale”.

Once, Figneria knew about the fact that Vissarion had a dream unlike a mercenary. It was not him who told her. At the place of a party for a won battle, his daughter let it slip out of her mouth.

“You know, Vissarion wants to make a country.”

“.....A country?”

“Where everyone can survive freezing coldness, be without starving, being frightened by bandits and wild beasts, and where anyone can live while laughing. He said that he wants to make such a country.”

Make a country.

It was too grand a dream that could only be evaluated as laughable. Even the people of the “Silver Gale”, who had an absolute trust in Vissarion and never went against his orders, never took this seriously and took it as a funny story.

More exactly, there was only one person who believed in his dream. It was Elen.

She had no hesitation in openly declaring that she would help with Vissarion’s dream. Therefore, she trained in swordsmanship and learned how to read and write.

Figneria showed the same reaction as almost all the members of the “Silver Gale” did when she heard this story for the first time. She was literally speechless.

“Even if it’s a dream, why don’t you do something a bit realistic?”

“I intend to make it come true.”

Figneria failed to laugh at Vissarion’s reply. This was because although the mercenary group’s leader was smiling, both his eyes overflowed with a calm determination.

Afterwards, Figneria helplessly kept company with Vissarion’s talk several times. This was because except the two people: Elen and Lim, she was the only other person who was there to listen to his dream.

Naturally, Figneria did not have the knowledge on hand. She basically just played listener’s role and asked questions only about parts that she was interested in. Even so, Vissarion seemed to be happy to get a precious listener.

However, Vissarion’s dream never came true.

It was Figneria who cut his dream apart together with his life.

In a certain battlefield, she and the “Silver Gale” became mutual enemies. In the battle, Figneria fought Vissarion in a one-on-one fight and cut him.

For a mercenary group, the part it's depend on the group leader ability as commander was big. The “Silver Gale” was no exception too. After the war ended, several mercenaries left the group on that same day. Even women, some who were closed to the mercenaries left the group; and some said that they would return to their hometowns and disappeared.

Like melting snow melted, the mercenary group quietly disappeared.

It was the story of when Figneria was 20 and Elen was 13.

Chapter 1 - Audience

The cool spring wind blew through the grassy plain filled with gentle ups and downs. There were few clouds in the sky and the sunlight vividly showed the blooming flowers and the figures of butterflies dancing between them.

The highway which extended through the grassy plain was filled with iron, men and horses. They were going north on the highway with Brune Kingdom's capital Nice as the destination.

Various battle flags were fluttering in the wind; if there were the Brune Kingdom's Red Horse Flags, there were also the neighboring Kingdom Zhcted's Black Dragon Flags. Moreover, even battle flags of local feudal lords and knight squadrons displayed their existence.

Weapons and armors being dirty with blood and mud, and wounded people being conspicuous among soldiers were because it was after a battle.

The name of this combined army was "Moonlight Knights Army". They numbered approximately 10,000.

Tigrevurmud Vorn who acted as the supreme commander was 18 years old. He was the Earl ruling the land Alsace in the frontier, and was called by his nickname Tigre by those close to him. His darkish red hair was not particular well-arranged and there was a calm brightness as to let one feel one's virtue in his black pupils.

The fact of him being a countryside feudal lord aside, he might look unreliable as a supreme commander leading an army of 10,000. Both his appearance of leather armor on hemp clothes and the aspect where he greatly yawned on horseback, wrapped in the warm air of spring, emphasized that impression.

But, there was no other person among the Brune people that has achieved as many distinguished military services as him. Two years ago, Tigre drove away

the Muozinel Kingdom's large army, which invaded Brune, with a small army. In addition, he defeated Duke Thenardier, who attempted to assassinate Princess Regin, in battle and quelled the civil war.

Moreover, he intervened in the civil war of the neighboring country Asvarre due to various reasons, cooperated with a General called Tallard Graham and defeated Prince Elliot's army.

And seven days ago, Tigre fought against an army of the Sachstein Kingdom which invaded Brune and won. Although the Sachstein army attacked from the west and the south and the enemy of the west still remained, it was a valuable victory for Brune which had kept losing.

At the time when it would probably take another koku until the sun reached the zenith, the capital Nice surrounded by gray ramparts could be seen.

In a place approximately 500 Alsins (500 meter) away from the capital, Tigre stopped the army. He thought that it would probably make the people of the capital anxious if the army got too close.

"Set up a camp. And take a rest in turns."

After giving such orders to the soldiers, Tigre turned to look at Mashas waiting next to him. He was a close friend of Tigre's late father and the man whom the youth relied on the most. Now, he was acting as the mediator of the Brune nobles.

"Lord Mashas. Who do you think would be good to send as a messenger to the royal palace?"

"If we wait here, a messenger will come from their side sooner or later. The report of the victory has been made long ago after all."

While stroking his gray beard, the old Earl, who turned 57 this year, replied.

After having killed Sachstein's General Kreuger in the battle seven days ago, Tigre and company immediately sent a messenger to the capital. It was in order to dispel the anxiety of the people of the capital and boost their allies' morale by means of the victory report. The battle was not over yet after all.

Just as Mashas had said, not even a half koku had passed and Tigre received a

report from a soldier.

“Excuse me, Your Excellency Earl. A person named Gerard Augres who said to be a messenger from the royal palace demanded an interview with you.”

“Let him through right away.”

Tigre answered with a bright face. For Tigre, Gerard was one of his reliable comrades in arms. Before long, one man showed up as he passed through a swarm of men, horses and armor.

He wrapped his slender body in gray official clothes and his bronze pupils were filled with brightness. As he roughly smoothed down his quirky brown hair, he bowed to Tigre in a polite manner.

“It has been a long time, Earl Vorn. I was ordered by Her Highness the Princess to serve as your guide to the royal palace and thus came. —I have heard various stories, but I feel relieved that there were no unusual events.”

“I’m also glad to see that you’re looking healthy, Gerard. How is Viscount Augres?”

“Thinking a little about his age, he looks unexpectedly full of vigor.”

Although Gerard’s words were merciless as usual, respect to his father could be felt in his tone. Then, he also bowed to Mashas standing next to Tigre. Mashas asked.

“Gerard. Does the fact that you came here mean that the preparations before our audience with Her Highness the Princess should be left to your discretion?”

Brune was currently ruled by a Princess. The Princess’s name was Regin Ester Loire Bastian do Charles. Although it was because of the late King Faron’s unexpected death, a Princess sitting on the throne was unprecedented in Brune.

But, the three men here have pledged allegiance to her as Brune’s retainers. So even if the Princess’s name was mentioned, there was no problem between them.

“Well, basically. But about that matter, I would like to ask something to you two.”

Gerard lowered the volume of his voice without erasing his smile. Tigre and Mashas swiftly exchanged gazes. Mashas called one soldier and briefly told him something. That soldier called out to the other soldiers and they went away from Tigre and company with very natural steps.

“---If it’s an important talk, should I call Elen?”

There were currently two Vanadis in the Moonlight Knights Army.

They were Eleonora Viltaria with the nickname of “Wind Princess of the Silver Flash”, and Valentina Glinka Estes with the name of “Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow”. They, who were prominent figures in the neighboring country Zhcted, were cooperating with Tigre by an order from the Zhcted King Victor.

Eleonora was called by her nickname Elen by those close to her, and Tigre was also allowed to call her so. For the youth, she was not only a comrade in arms, but also an irreplaceable existence.

Elen too should probably felt the same way towards Tigre.

On the other hand, he had just met Valentina for the first time the other day, and there were many parts that he did not understand about her personality. However, it was a fact that she lent her power to Tigre in her own way.

Those two women had the same rank in the Moonlight Knights Army. If he was to call just Elen and not Valentina for this important talk, a feeling of unfairness would emerge.

So, Tigre thought that he would judge whether he should call them after hearing the talk in detail.

As he confirmed that there was no longer anyone around the three of them, Gerard began to talk.

“We have heard the details of the battle from the messenger that you people have sent. In that regard, in order to spread around that victory, Her Highness Princess Regin and His Excellency the Prime Minister requested that they would like you to pass through the gate of the capital with a group of about 50 people including Earl Vorn. It is a little ceremony of triumphal return.”

“Among the 50 people, Zhcted people are also included, right?”

Gerard nodded at Tigre who asked as to confirm.

Only cheering up the residents of the city by victory was not enough. It was also necessary to have them understand that the Zhcted army was an allied force. With just the fact that a foreign army was inside the country, most people would be wary.

“A party will be opened at night, so after the audience is over, you will be resting in rooms that we have prepared for you. By the way.....currently in the capital, an unpleasant rumor about you has spread.”

Gerard, unable to hide his displeasure, twisted his mouth and continued explaining.

“Something like Earl Vorn has betrayed Brune and has become Zhcted’s cat’s-paw^[1].”

“It’s a rumor that we can’t ignore, eh.”

Mashas indignantly furrowed his eyebrows. Though Tigre did not say anything, he could not suppress the unpleasant feelings floating on his face.

“It’s probably the doing of the faction following Melisande. They must have spread such a rumor when they learned that Tigre came back from Zhcted after getting the cooperation of Eleonora-dono and company.”

Mashas spitted out so in a rough tone.

Melisande was a woman from Brune’s royal family, and like an aunt for Regin. She was also the wife of Duke Thenardier who took action: plotting the usurpation of the throne and Regin’s assassination.

It looked like she, who lost her son and husband in the civil war two years ago, had been quietly spending her days in a shrine located in Nemetacum that was once governed by Duke Thenardier. But, she was just pretending to do so, secretly gathering allies and waiting for an opportunity to overthrow Regin.

Because she was such a woman, it was no wonder that Mashas concluded so. However, Gerard shook his head.

“My father and I also thought so at first, but it looks like it is somehow wrong. They actively spread rumors for sure, but this rumor’s source is from a far-off

location. Regarding the reactions about this rumor, outside the royal palace — in other words, most of the populace has ignored it.”

“Was the report about the Sachstein army’s defeat effective?”

As Tigre asked so, Gerard revealed an evil smile.

“Yes. The fact about the victory was strong above all, after all. We have actively spread a rumor, too. That Earl Vorn would definitely defeat the Sachstein army and regain peace in Brune like when he suppressed the civil war before. Although, it would have been dangerous had the victory report been late.”

The youth held his breath to Gerard’s lines. If he had failed to kill Kreuger at that time and the battle had dragged on, it might have resulted in an irreparable situation.

However, it looked like it was still too early to feel relieved. Gerard made a grim face as if to say “let’s finally get to the difficult problem”.

“Enough about outside the royal palace, the problem is inside the palace. Aside from Melisande’s faction, there are also other groups who believed this rumor.”

As he let a strong disdain ooze into his bronze pupils, Gerard continued his words.

“There are people who are cautious of Zhcted and Vanadis-dono and those who simply don’t like Earl Vorn’s existence. Regarding the latter, they are quite diverse. If I were to cite those who despised the bow, those who looked down on Earl Vorn with the fact that he is a small noble as reason, and those who are jealous of his numerous distinguished military services, there would be no end.”

“Looks like I became quite popular during the time when I was away from Brune.”

“Except that you aren’t bathed in gazes of encouragement, but rather in the ones of disdain, jealousy and suspicion.”

Tigre shrugged his shoulders as Gerard returned his joke with sarcasm. The youth casually took off his gaze from Gerard and looked at his bow put in a

slightly distant place.

In Brune, sword, spear and horsemanship were esteemed; and the evaluation of the bow was extremely low. It was to the extent that it was said that those, who used a bow in the battlefield, were weak people, who could use neither a sword nor spear, and were hunters or criminals. There was also a story of an archer squad which, although achieved big results in war, was not recognized.

Tigre was the owner of prominent ability in the bow, but he could not decently wield a sword or spear. Although a noble, it could not be said that he had a good pedigree. His territory was also Alsace located in the frontier.

For the Brune people who valued pedigree and lineage, and made much account of the sword and spear, the existence of a man such as Tigre was hard to understand; and they would not tolerate it.

He had imagined that, but when hearing the talk from Gerard, who knew very well about the circumstances of the royal palace, like this, a shock tinged with coldness once again wrapped Tigre's body.

“---No, my awareness was still naïve.”

Hadn't the Zhcted King Victor also said it? That even if the Brune people did not recognize Tigre's bow skill, they could not ignore his war results.

“For the sake of the residents of the city, they want Tigre and Vanadis-dono to pass through the capital's gate. But, there are many people, who don't like Tigre and Vanadis-dono, in the royal palace. Is that it?”

Mashas summarized the talk like so while shaking his short and stout body. The brown-haired secretary nodded with an expression looking like he was enduring a headache.

“Yes. On the other hand, if Earl Vorn and Vanadis-dono don't enter the capital and don't have an audience with Her Highness the Princess, it will just emphasize the belief in the rumor of the betrayal. Besides, Her Highness the Princess wants to see Earl Vorn very much; so if you were to take your leave here, my head will be compromised.”

“Aren't you exaggerating a little? I also want to see Her Highness the Princess, but.....”

When Tigre said so, Gerard greatly shook his head.

“It’s not my intention to exaggerate. But, the fact that you fell in the sea on the way back from Asvarre to Zhcted had already made Her Highness so worried.”

Mashas who was listening to the talk next to Tigre made an expression saying that he did not know what to say. It was a fact that Regin was worried about Tigre, but this secretary calmly hid the fact that she showed anger, that she had never showed before, towards Zhcted.

“From the viewpoint of Her Highness the Princess, it won’t do any good not to give even a few words to the two Vanadises who have cooperated with our country. And, if she is to meet with the Vanadises and don’t meet you, the Vanadises will hold doubt towards the Princess, right?”

In Zhcted, the Vanadises had authority second only to the King, and were existences whom one should pay respect to. Moreover, although it was an order of King Victor, they led soldiers, fought for Brune and shed blood.

If Regin were to impolitely deal with Elen and company, it would greatly affect future diplomacy. And as a ruler, she would buy dejection and disappointment from the surroundings.

“—I understand. I’ll ask Elen and Valentina.”

Tigre replied while rummaging his darkish red hair. Regin would probably arrange for Elen and company’s safety. Still, though he felt bad about making them feel unpleasant, the situation would become more troublesome if they were to avoid the audience. The two girls should understand that.

To Gerard who bowed his head saying “yes, please”, Mashas asked as he remembered.

“By the way, Lord Gerard. What’s become of Melisande?”

Mashas’s voice was low; Gerard, who raised his face, let hostility ooze in his bronze pupils.

“She is still staying in a guest room even now. With the pretext that her punishment, about the matter which brought about unnecessary commotion, is

under consideration.”

During the Halo Festival which celebrated the beginning of the New Year, Melisande aimed at sinking Regin’s authority. She, who knew that the “Durandal”, that was in the royal palace, was a fake, ordered Viscount Armand to destroy the fake Durandal.

Durandal was the kingdom’s sacred sword said to have been wielded by the founder Charles, and if they were to lose it, Regin’s reign would greatly shake. But, Melisande’s aim failed due to the trap that Regin had set and she lost face on the contrary.

“It’s also the same for Viscount Armand. Of course, they are in different rooms. He has been given freedom to walk around in the royal palace to some extent.”

“Do you intend to use them as bait?”

Gerard answered with a displeased expression to Tigre’s question.

“As expected, he seems to be careful, so we’ve obtained no results as of yet.”

In the royal palace, there were many nobles who supported Melisande. They were originally under Duke Thenardier’s umbrella, but after his death, they gathered under Melisande.

Regin and company have left their existences as is. This was because if she were to take measures such as evicting them just because they did not support her, it would give a bad influence on other nobles. Regin’s position could not yet be called firm, so she must aim to not further increase her enemies.

Besides, Regin did not like the way of coercing by fear. She understood firm measures were required at times, but she wanted to explore for another way of doing things before adhering to them.

“About the fact that it was Melisande, who drew in the Sachstein troops, what kind of measures does Her Highness the Princess and the Prime Minister intends to take?”

Mashas answered as he lowered the volume of his voice even more. Melisande’s act was clearly something which harmed the country Brune. Even

her royal family lineage could not protect her anymore.

“Her highness the Princess concluded not to take any action at the present stage.”

Gerard’s face was covered in bitterness and his voice was tinged with irritation.

“She took out cautious that it would be suspected whether she isn’t going to take advantage of Sachstein’s invasion and use that to execute Melisande.”

The confrontation between Regin and Melisande became common knowledge with the matter of the fake Durandal.

If executing Melisande was considered to be something plotted by Regin, her popularity would fall. While Sachstein would inwardly be pleased with taking measures, they might ostensibly deny all relation with Melisande, and moreover blame Regin as a coward and justified their invasion.

“But, you can’t afford to leave them as is forever, right?”

When Tigre asked as to ascertain their intentions, Gerard shrugged his shoulders.

“We intend to decide about that after having completely kicked out the Sachstein troops, which are currently marching unjustly in our country.”

If they repelled the Sachstein army, Regin’s fame would increase. If they were to settle it at a stretch using that momentum, they would be able to prevent the rebellion somewhat. In so doing, they would not officially announce that Melisande was in contact with the Sachstein Kingdom. It was in order to minimize confusion.

“Certainly, there is only that way. So, who will play the role of repelling the Sachstein army?”

To Mashas’s question, Gerard moved his index finger and pointed to Tigre and Mashas. He wore an expression seemingly to want to say “who else other than you”.

“Her Highness the Princess has already given the order to other troops and military units; that they come under your command. Only Earl Vorn, who put

Her Highness on the throne, can increase her fame. As I said just a while ago, we have already spread the rumor^[2] after all.”

“I’m grateful for the soldiers increasing, but..... how many does it seem to be?”, Tigre asked.

“About 20,000 to 30,000 will be added, so I greatly estimate your army to number 40,000. According to the reports, the enemy’s number is 50,000; but it’s considered that their number somehow decreased as they had fought twice. So I estimated that both parties would have about the same number.”

This time, it was Tigre and Mashas’s turn to shrug their shoulders.



After Gerard left and Mashas went away from this place in order to issue instructions to the troops, Tigre sent a soldier to the camp of the Zhcted army to call Elen, Lim and Valentina. While he was talking with Gerard, the setting of camp progressed adequately.

Before long, the three women showed up in Tigre’s tent.

Elen — Eleonora Viltaria was 18 years old like Tigre. Her silver hair was long enough to reach to her waist, and liveliness and ambition dwelt in her ruby-colored pupils. She wrapped her body in a blue battle outfit and hung a long sword with a guard, which was modeled after wings, to her waist.

In addition to her beauty, her dashing attitude gathered attention just by her walking down the camp. As a warrior as well as a commander of an army, Elen was the owner of sufficient ability and she was also deeply trusted by the soldiers.

Lim has acted as Elen’s adjutant since the old days. She was 21, three years older than her lord; she tied her dull blond hair on the left side of her head and wore a blue battle outfit on her body. Although not even a fragment of amiability existed on her shapely face, people close to her knew well that Lim was a girl full of emotions.

Valentina was 23, two years older than Lim. She wrapped her body in a pure white dress unbecoming in a battlefield. Her long black hair looked very pretty in this dress which had roses everywhere.

Coupled with her bland smile, she would give off the impression of a neat and clean high-born lady to many people. Although she carried a large sickle of an ominous shape on her shoulder, the large sickle strangely blended into the atmosphere she wore and did not cause any sense of incongruity. This large sickle was her Dragonic Tool Ezendeis.

Unlike Elen, Valentina did not lead soldiers. Only she herself went ahead and stepped onto the land of Brune.

Though her ability as a warrior as well as a commander of an army was unknown, it was a fact that in the battle against Sachstein, Valentina's ingenuity led the Moonlight Knights army to victory.

"I'm sorry to have called you as you're busy."

When Tigre thanked the three women, he looked back towards the girl waiting on the side. This girl tied her chestnut-colored hair behind her head and wore a white apron on top a skirt with long sleeves reaching up to her feet.

"Titta. Please, serve us some drinks."

The girl called Titta lively answered "yes" as she brightened her hazel-colored pupils.

She was a maid who had served Tigre since he was a child. She loved Tigre, and even followed the youth when he proceeded to Zhcted as a guest General. Though she turned 17 this year, childishness still remained slightly on her lovely features.

Titta skillfully prepared something which diluted wine with honey and fruit juice squeezed, poured it into porcelain cups for the number of people and put them before the four people. After thanking the girl, Tigre turned around to Elen and company. He explained what he was asked by Gerard.

"Hmm. You are asking us to go to the royal palace while being fully aware that we will be exposed to unpleasant gazes, is that it?"

After drinking a mouthful of wine, Elen leaked such an impression with a cold smile.

“I’m sorry, but could you come with me?”

When Tigre put his porcelain cup aside, he deeply bowed his head to the extent that his forehead touched the ground. These women were on this land as friendly troops. No matter how many times you bow your head, it's still an impossible demand.

Elen and Lim did not immediately answered and looked at Valentina next to them leisurely drinking wine. They intended to accept it with a smile since it was a request from Tigre, but what about this black-haired Vanadis?

“This is quite delicious, eh. Can I ask for another cup?”

Valentina asked Titta with a smiling face. While the chestnut-haired maid hurriedly prepared it, the pure white dressed Vanadis turned her gaze at Tigre.

“Will it end with just gazes?”

Would the people in disfavor with Zhcted’s intervention not think of causing harm to Elen and company? Valentina was asking about that.

When Tigre raised his face, he stared at the three women with a difficult expression.

“I can’t say that it’ll absolutely be safe. But, I swear on my life and honor that I’ll protect the Zhcted people. Her Highness the Princess should also share the same thought.”

If Elen and company were attacked in the royal palace, Brune would also end up making an enemy out of Zhcted. Regin should be trying to avoid such a situation by any means. As for Tigre, he did not intend to change his declaration. He did not want these girls, who were important to him, to get injured.

“Lord Tigrevurmud. How many days does it look like we will stay in the capital Nice?”

Lim who remained silent until then asked in an indifferent tone.

“I talked about it with Lord Mashas, and we will stay there for three days

including today.”

It was a number which came out when they considered the time it would take for resupply of arms and food, reorganization of the army and intelligence gathering.

Tigre wanted to add another day, but if he were to do that, food and supplies would be necessary accordingly. In addition taking into consideration the fact that the enemy was approaching from the west, he could not spend more time.

“I don’t mind it. It’s impossible to escape such gazes on foreign soil. I can’t afford to worry about it each and every time. Besides as a Vanadis of Zhcted, it’s necessary for me to meet with Princess Regin.”

As she drank up the wine in her porcelain cup at a stretch, Elen said so. As if she was waiting for her words, Valentina also opened her mouth.

“I will go, too. I cannot decline it when being asked by a young hero.”

“How about you rest your body in the camp? It’s a quite tiring duty to go to the royal palace and meet with the Princess. Won’t it be painful for you whose body is weak?”

With folded arms, Elen turned a sharp gaze to the black-haired Vanadis. Although her words might sound like she was worried about the other party, it was clear that those were lines spoken from wariness towards Valentina. And speaking of Valentina, she eluded Elen’s glaring eyes with a smile.

“When you say that, I really want to take you up on your offer, but I am also a Vanadis after all. Besides, I have never met with Her Highness Princess Regin.”

Elen squinted her eyes as she searched for Valentina’s intention, but without inquiring any further, she turned her gaze to Tigre.

“Now then, Tigre. Let’s quickly get personnel’s selection over with.”

As a result from their talk, the 50 people who were entering the capital were as followed. It was a composition of 28 Brune people commanded by Tigre and Mashas and 18 Zhcted people led by Elen and Valentina.

The Zhcted people were all Elen’s subordinates and LeitMeritz’s soldiers; it

was Lim and Rurick who gathered them. Rurick was the man among LeitMeritz's knights that Tigre trusted the most. Rurick also trusted Tigre and was even proud of fighting together with him.

Among the Brune people, there were Gaspar, Mashas's son, and Scheie who led the Lutece Knight Squadron. In addition, Titta would also accompany Tigre as an attendant.

"Earl Vorn, do you take only one maid along with you?"

Having asked Tigre that with a wondering face was Earl Bouroullec. He was a Brune noble who came under the command of the Moonlight Knights army and fought hard in the battle against the Sachstein army. He had the position of representative of the various nobles who joined the Moonlight Knights army, and he took five attendants with him.

Tigre answered with a wry smile.

"There are people that I brought from Alsace, but they haven't received an attendant's education."

Bertrand, who had acted as a personal attendant since Tigre was young, lost his life in the civil war two years ago. Of course, there were people other than him that had also received the education for being a personal attendant; but those who had the ability that would pass in a royal court had died in the civil war.

Still, the fact that it didn't become a pressing matter was because Tigre has been staying in LeitMeritz as a guest General until recently. When there was a situation where he needed an attendant, those close to him such as Lim or Rurick would fill in.

"I see. But then, it won't look good enough. Shall I lend some of my attendants to you?"

Bouroullec said so with good will. Although understanding that, Tigre politely refused it after expressing his gratitude.

As soon as they passed through the castle wall and entered the main street,

Tigre and the 50 horsemen were flooded with amazing cheers.

Soldiers stood on both sides of the main street at regular intervals, standing guard so that the people crowding there did not step on the street. As expected, they had been frightened by Sachstein's invasion. In addition, the rumor that Gerard and company had spread probably made them have hope, too.

Tigre tightened his face in tension and advanced straight looking only at the front. Only he wore formal clothes which Gerard had prepared.

Tigre himself was reluctant to wear it, but when being told that a supreme commander should not meet the Princess with a shabby outfit, he was not able to reject it.

Although Gerard who was riding a horse next to the youth revealed an evil grin when he looked at Tigre, if he were to tease Tigre and the youth were to display a strange reaction here, there was the fear that the illusion of the young hero might collapse. So, he just devoted himself to his role as the guide^[3] with a face as solemn as possible.

There were people who turned complicated gazes to Elen, Lim and Valentina who were Zhcted people, but they were very few. The great majority of people welcomed them as cooperators, and moreover poured looks of longing and admiration to their beauty.

Tigre who finally relaxed his tension whispered to Gerard next to him.

"It looks like there are no people holding hostility towards me here."

"There'd be no meaning in making a racket here after all. By throwing cold water on the joy of victory, they'd only stir the hostility and antipathy of the people."

While listening to Gerard's words, Tigre turned his gaze to the outside of the main street. He had the feeling of having heard something like singing voices mixed in the cheers.

When the battle flag of a meteor flutters in the battlefield The Goddess of wind and storm snuggles up to him with a smile

***No matter the season or the sky
If the Knight of Moonlight draws his bowstring It's impossible to escape
from his arrow
There are no means preventing it no matter the armor or the shield
He defeats the most ferocious enemies And drives away the disaster to
befall
He saved the Princess held captive by evil soldiers And becomes an arrow
promising victory
Oh, Knight of Moonlight Your bravery is for justice
Your benevolence is for the people Your loyalty is for the Princess.....***

“—What the hell is that?”

“It’ll be quick to advertise like that, won’t it? The fame (popularity) will be excellent.”

To Tigre whose face became stiff, Gerard answered with an unconcerned face.

“We had a hard time, you know? After all, there were only old poems that praise the bow in this country.”

Tigre said nothing after that and only stayed quiet so as to not expose his feelings. Judging from Gerard’s words, that poem must have considerably spread out. There was no means of stopping it. At best, he could only have them revise the contents of the poem to some extent later.

Tigre turned his gaze ahead of the main street — to Luberon Mountain rising in the center of the capital. The royal palace was halfway up this mountain. Regin should be waiting there.



It was about seven days later after meeting the Dragonic Tool that Figneria

arrived at the Zhcted Kingdom's capital Silesia.

The capital was wrapped up in spring weather, and warm sunlight poured from the early afternoon sky. Even though the Sun Festival celebrating the New Year was over and a dozen of days have passed, its remaining heat seemed to be left here and there in the capital.

Figneria was 25 years old. Although she continued her mercenary work, she was not seeking battlefields as much as before. It was now to the extent of wielding her blade if there was a battlefield ahead of where her feet led her.

She was the owner of a balanced tall figure, and on top of her black clothes, she put on an overcoat which got dirty by the long journey. The left half of her face was covered with her long black hair, and only her long slit like right pupil indifferently gazed at the cityscape of the capital wrapped up in liveliness.

There was a pair of swords decorated with splendid ornaments on both sides of her waist.

The Luminous Flame, Bargren. This Dragonic Tool, which had the nickname of "Twin Blades of Demonic Force", was a pair of blades consisting of a golden blade and a vermillion blade that led Figneria to the capital.

"---such a lively place doesn't match my character after all."

As she inwardly muttered such an impression, she walked straight through the main street leading to the royal palace. For Figneria, who moved from battlefield to battlefield for a decade, towns and cities were only places to rest her body, resupply arms and food, and collect information.

The royal palace could be seen before long. Figneria stopped and looked down at her figure covered with dirt from her trip. It was not an appearance with which she should be going to have an audience with the King from now on.

But as she shook her head so as to say that there was no problem, she returned her gaze to the royal palace and began to walk again. She did not have any spare clothes and, above all, it was not like she wished for the audience.

Figneria, who arrived before the royal palace, showed her twin swords to the gatekeeper looking dubious. Sure enough, the gatekeeper stared at her with an expression of surprise.

“I will go report immediately, so please wait for a short while.”

Although feeling perplexed to the gatekeeper’s change of attitude, Figneria nodded.

She, who was born a poor commoner and had lived as a mercenary in order to eat, had never received such treatment from others. Although she had been turned looks of respect by young mercenaries under her command in a battlefield, those again were ones of a different kind.

As she wondered whether she would be kept waiting for at least one koku, her expectation was off the mark. While a quarter koku hasn’t even passed, people who wrapped their bodies in official clothes appeared and respectfully bowed to Figneria.

“Vanadis of the Twin Swords. We are glad that you have come safely. We have prepared a room, so please relax there first. When the preparations are over, I shall guide you for the audience.”

Having been waiting for Figneria for the audience were two men. They were an old man sitting down on the throne and a man standing by his side. The one on the throne would be the Zhcted King Victor.

The figures of royal guards were nowhere to be found. Figneria, who wondered whether they had hid themselves, carefully searched for their presence; but she was not able to detect the presence of such people.

“---Does this mean that they’ve been dismissed?”

“Vanadis. Come before me.”

King Victor called out to Figneria. Although not loud, it was a well-projected voice without cloudiness that was peculiar to old men. Figneria walked on a red carpet and got down on a knee about ten steps away from the throne.

Although she felt a slight amount of discomfort, it did not show on her face.

Unlike knights or nobles, mercenaries served neither a kingdom nor a royal family. Not receiving anybody’s protection and on the other hand being free from anyone was what being a mercenary was. For Figneria, who had lived in

this way, it was not fun at all to get on down on her knee before someone that she did not even recognize.

But, she at least had the judgment/discretion of 'knowing her place'. With a face devoid of feelings, she looked up at the King.

“---When looking closer like this, he's a dead tree-like old man.”

That was Figneria's first impression of the King. But, she knew well the danger of judging others only from their appearances.

“I'm called Figneria. I was showed the way by these swords and came.”

「この竜具——バルグレンに
道を教えられて、来ました」



Though the female mercenary's way of speaking was rude, neither Victor nor the man beside him blamed her. The old King glared at Figneria and calmly told.

"Good. I recognize you as Bargren's Vanadis. I bestowed to you the nickname of "Hidden Princess of the Luminous Flame", the surname Alshavin and the Legnica dukedom. From here on, you shall proceed to Legnica, manage the retainers as a Princess and govern there."

Victor's tone was businesslike, and the atmosphere pleased with the birth of a new Vanadis could not be felt there at all. Figneria found that strange, but more than that, she was concerned about the fact that Victor did not doubt her words at all.

"Do you..... believe me? Even though this Bargren might be a fake?"

"If it is a fake, the true Bargren will not leave it as is. You are without a doubt a Vanadis."

"---He's speaking as if the Dragonic Tool is a living thing, huh."

Figneria knitted her brows. That said, she understood well that Bargren was not just a pair of twin swords. After all, it has appealed to her consciousness not with words, but with a strange feeling that could even be described as thought and brought her until the capital.

"I expect a lot of activity from you as Vanadis."

These were words which suggested withdrawal. With a disappointed face, the black-haired female mercenary stared at the old King's face. *Is that all?* She thought.

It was not like she wanted to carry an only bombastic, empty conversation common among some noble feudal lords. This very concise one fit her nature.

But still she did not think that he would not ask anything about her background/identity.

To Victor sitting on the throne with an air of composure, Figneria frankly threw the question that she held so far.

"There is something that I would like to ask your Majesty. Why was I chosen as a Vanadis?"

“It is not my place to know that. Having chosen you as a Vanadis was the Dragonic Tool after all.”

The old King answered as if it was nothing. Figneria was perplexed. She had been thinking until now that Victor had ordered the Dragonic Tool to choose her. If not, wasn't it strange? After all, the King was the existence which ruled Zhcted.

But if it was as Victor said, then it meant that the Dragonic Tool chose Figneria as a Vanadis from its own will. Moreover, only the Dragonic Tool knew the reason why it chose her.

Victor moved his head and turned his gaze to the man waiting beside him.

“This man is Eugene Shebalin. He is the person who will answer your questions, and the man who will become your next King. You should ask about things from here on to Shebalin.”

Waiting for Victor to finish speaking, Eugene stepped forward. He calmly walked in the audience room and stood before Figneria.

“Please stand. Vanadis-dono”

He should be in his mid-forties. He was a man of calm appearance that wrapped his slim figure in white official clothes. He had a slender face and there was a long gray beard under his chin. Figneria stood up and stared at him. This black-haired female mercenary was taller than Eugene.

“I will visit Vanadis-dono's room later on. Let's talk in detail there. If there is something that I can answer, I will do it.”

“I'll be thankful if you do so.”

Finally regaining her usual demeanor, Figneria responded so.

The audience with the King was over.

Figneria, who returned to the guest room after the end of the audience, could not bring herself to sit on a chair, and leaned against the wall. She wanted to be away from the carpet spread out on the floor and the various furnishings decorating the room even if by a little.

She seemed to have formally become a Vanadis, but it did not feel like that to her at all. The King too, when seeing him up close, just gave her the impression of an old man. Even if now at this moment the door were to open, a clown appeared and said that this was a play, she felt like she would be able to consent.

Of course, there was no way that a clown would appear, and after about a quarter koku had passed, it was Eugene who visited the guest room. Although Eugene revealed a wondering face seeing Figneria standing alongside the wall, he bowed without alluding to it.

“Shall I have some drink be brought in?”

Figneria was inwardly impressed. While Eugene’s attitude was polite, he wore an easy to speak atmosphere as almost no stiffness could be felt there. He also held a favorable impression in the fact that there was no color of doubt or contempt in his eyes which looked at her.

“I’ll pass. I’ve decided not to drink alcohol when I talk about something important. I’ll get to the main point at once..... what should I do from now on?”

“Govern one’s dukedom and when there is an order from His Majesty, move soldiers. This is what a Vanadis should do. In your case, as His Majesty said, you will govern the Legnica Dukedom in the west.”

“To give me a dukedom like that so easily, how generous. Unfortunately, I have no experience whatsoever of being the chief of a town or a village, let alone a country. Is it all right to entrust it to such a woman?”

“I know some Vanadis, and almost none of them had the experience of governing a country. Besides, no matter which country, there are bureaucrats of literary and military arts who will support Vanadis-dono. Of course, in Legnica, too.”

Eugene’s reply was clear without hesitation. Figneria decided to try coming on strongly (T/N: not in a sexual way).

“Then if I were to do whatever I want without thinking with Legnica, what would you do?”

“That would be a problem, I guess.”

Because Eugene answered with a serious face, Figneria almost burst into laughter unintentionally.

“Just that? Wouldn’t you for example send an army or make me quit being Vanadis?”

To Figneria’s provocative words, Eugene remained silent for the first time. However, the black-haired female mercenary immediately understood that it was not like he was at a loss for words.

After a while, Eugene said.

“You may not believe me, but..... Only your Dragonic Tool is able to deprive you of your qualifications as Vanadis. Even His Majesty cannot do that.”

The edge of her mouth twitched. She failed to laugh it off thinking “what kind of joke is this?”

‘The Dragonic Tool doesn’t receive orders from the King’. Eugene was saying so. Judging from his serious expression, it did not look like he was saying some nonsense.

“The King said that he doesn’t know the reason why this guy chose me as Vanadis. Is it true?”

“Vanadis-dono. I am also a retainer of His Majesty, so could you at least change your way of talking?”

After rebuking in a gentle voice, Eugene answered the black-haired female mercenary’s question.

“It is said that the Dragonic Tool’s will is only transmitted to its master.”

Figneria shook her head as though to say that she could not believe it, and sighed.

Because a King was put on the throne, a Kingdom was formed. The Heavens where the gods lived aside, there should not be any existences above a King on Earth. Even a mercenary like Figneria knew that.

Wasn’t Dragonic Tools’ existence something which shook the kingdom from its root?

Unknown fear and strain gradually rose up from deep within her body. While softly holding the twin swords on her waist, Figneria asked.

“What is this?”

“It is something which has chosen Vanadis for generations since this Zhcted country came into existence. As far as I know, it holds mysterious power like those coming out of fairy tales and it has its own will.”

Figneria broadly smiled at the word “fairy tale”. She thought that it was a good expression. It was far easier to accept than exaggerated words like miracle or protection of the gods.

She had no intention of denying the fact that the Dragonic Tool had a mysterious power.

Figneria once again recalled what happened seven days ago. She was travelling in a wasteland.

When she heard a strange sound and the space in front of her suddenly shone, these twin swords appeared. And, being guided by the will emitted by the Dragonic Tool, Figneria came to the capital.

“I understood what you said, but..... I’m amazed that you guys haven’t yet shattered this thing.”

“Vanadis-dono, do you know the country’s founding myth?”

Eugene asked with a serious expression. Figneria nodded.

“A travelling man calling himself the incarnation of the Black Dragon gained seven clans as his allies and made this country, right?”

The founding myth brought about numerous poems and tales and was transmitted to the people in many forms. Even a child, who has never gone out of his small village in the countryside, would know what Figneria said.

“That’s right. Dragonic Tools are things that the founder King handed to his wives. There is no way it could be destroyed; taking into consideration that Dragonic Tools are looking for Vanadis for the King, then all the more so.”

“Even if it chooses someone like me as a Vanadis?”

“—I don’t know.”

After having made a short pause as he was thinking, Eugene continued his words as he prefaced so.

“I do not think that a Dragonic Tool chooses a Vanadis quite randomly. In addition, there had also been precedents where a Dragonic Tool suddenly left the side of a Vanadis, and that person stopped being a Vanadis. A Dragonic Tool has its own standards for choosing a Vanadis and it’s probably based on them that Figneria-dono has been chosen.”

“Did you think so even after having seen other Vanadises?”

When Figneria asked, Eugene calmly replied “yes”.

“I want to try asking about that to the other Vanadises.”

As she muttered so, Figneria remembered one Vanadis.

“Do you know the Vanadis called Eleonora?”

“Yes, I do, but..... Are you acquainted with her?”

Being asked so, Figneria was suddenly at a loss for words. It was not wrong to call them acquaintance, but that girl was the type that she wanted to live without meeting her.

Figneria thought that the fact of having killed Vissarion was something which could not be helped.

They clashed with each other as enemies in a battlefield. As none of the two of them had any way to avoid a fight, one of them couldn’t help but die.

But, that was Figneria’s circumstances and whether or not Elen would understand it was a different story. Furthermore, it was not like Figneria had completely come to terms with it. At the same time that the fact that “it couldn’t be helped” was a realistic recognition, they were also words in order to persuade herself.

“Well, I’m a mercenary.”

When she said so, Eugene revealed a consenting expression. This man seems to know that Elen was once a mercenary.

“Eleonora-dono governs LeitMeritz. It’s the dukedom to the south of Legnica that you will govern.”

The twin swords hung on her waist seemed like it was unpleasant to Figneria after all.

“---I might as well just go to a far-off country without heading to Legnica.”

In doing so, the Dragonic Tool would lose affection towards her and end up leaving.

“---But.....”

Figneria dropped her gaze to the twin swords and sunk into her thoughts.

This was probably the only opportunity. If she were to miss this opportunity, she, who was only a mere mercenary, would definitely never have another chance to manage a state.

The face of Vissarion revealing a gentle smile floated in Figneria’s mind.

At the time when she was made to listen to the story of his dream, it was only once, but Figneria had wondered about what she would aim for if she were to manage a state.

Not only she was never gotten influenced, since the thought associate with it was too outrageous, she reveal it to Vissarion. It was something totally different from his dream, but the mercenary group’s leader listened carefully with great interest.

She has not forgotten. But, she put it away in a corner of her memory and thought that she would never take it out again.

Figneria’s eyes became steep. Did this Dragonic Tool possibly react to her memories? She was about to laugh it off as absurd, but after having heard Eugene’s talk, it was also certain that nothing beside that came to her mind.

“---It might become an offering.”

She did not inherit Vissarion’s wish. After all, there was no way that she, who killed him, would have such a qualification/right. But, it would become the tales of her travels to him.

“---But, not yet.”

“Shebalin... dono. I’ve one request.”

As she added an honorific which she was not accustomed to using, Figneria looked at Eugene. Before becoming a Vanadis, there was something that she had to confirm as a warrior.

“There is a place here that soldiers use for training, right? Could you tell me where it is?”

“I can guide you there, but..... What do you intend to do?”

To Eugene who revealed a puzzled face, Figneria answered with an indifferent face.

“I just want to try swinging this around a little. I won’t cause you any trouble.”

It was the nearest courtyard from the guest room that Figneria was guided to.

It was a small space surrounded by the colonnade, and where about ten people could train all at once. Respectively, six wooden swords and spears without spearheads were leaned against a corner.

The courtyard was empty right now as no one was using it.

“Is here all right?”

“It’s perfect. Thank you.”

As Figneria thanked Eugene, she advanced until the center of the courtyard.

She stretched both her hands to her waist and slowly unsheathed the twin swords.

Figneria has not wielded this Dragonic Tool after meeting it seven days ago until today. It was not particularly as if she thought that it was daunting. She just could not bring herself to trust it as her weapon.

“---I shall test you as a weapon.”

Even if the Luminous Flame accepted her as a Vanadis, whether or not she would accept the Luminous Flame was a different story. Figneria wanted to

make sure of whether the Dragonic Tool was an existence suitable for her here.

The white handles with a smooth surface stuck just right to her palms; as if it had been made to fit in Figneria's hands. The short sword of each side was by no means too heavy, and they were also not too light, either.

Figneria's surprised face was reflected on the polished vermillion and golden blades. As a mercenary, she had handled various weapons, but such an experience was a first for her.

She lowered her waist and set up the twin swords. She slightly inhaled, then exhaled.

She raised overhead the vermillion blade that she grasped in her right hand and mowed down the golden blade in her left hand to match it. She pushed one up from underneath and swung the other down from overhead. The sound which howled the air with each flash tickled the ears and it felt comfortable.



She stepped forward as if dancing, letting the hem of her skirt flutter. She jumped to the side while mixing a kick with a slash. She mowed down, cut off, stepped forward and sharply thrust.

Figneria transmitted to the twin swords how she has wielded various weapons in many battlefields that she had gotten through so far, using her whole body.

There was a man with superior sword skill. There was a warrior with a big body who easily swung a huge ax around. There were also situations where she had been surrounded by soldiers with spears and there were also situations where she had confronted cavalymen who charged head on at her.

In a wasteland, in a grassy plain, within a dim fortress, deep in snowy mountains, Figneria had continued fighting.

The twin swords greedily absorbed Figneria's experiences. They continued depicting trajectories just as she wanted, and did not show even a slight gap.

Unconsciously, Figneria let her lips curl into a smile. Her eyes shone like those of a child who discovered a treasure. If there was what was called an ideal weapon, this Dragonic Tool was exactly as such for her.

Suddenly, the twin swords' blades emitted a red brightness. The two blades were clad in crimson flames, scattered sparks and burnt the atmosphere. This time, the Dragonic Tool inquired about Figneria's ability.

The smile which was floating on Figneria's lips changed to a fearless one. Of course, she accepted the Luminous Flame's challenge.

Figneria's movements changed into those of a dance clad in flames. The red and golden flames sometimes became a straight slash, or overlapped innumerable and turned into a flower and that vividly colored her surroundings.

When a quarter koku had passed, Figneria finally stopped her movements.

Her breathing was so rough that her shoulders shook, and her face was covered with sweat. As her clothes which got wet stuck to her body, Figneria frowned in displeasure.

"—I got it."

Figneria muttered inside her mouth. It was not that she admitted defeat. She just accepted it.

The flames have already disappeared from the twin swords' blades. Figneria put the Dragonic Tool in their sheaths. In her pair of eyes, a calm determination flickered like a flame.

“I’ll at least try doing what I can.”

Figneria Alshavin has thus begun to walk her path as a Vanadis.

Chapter 2 - Mischief

In one room of the royal palace, several men gathered.

Surrounding a big table put in the center of the room, they were exchanging serious gazes. Their ages varied; if there was a man who was in his twenties, there was also one who apparently was in his thirties.

What they had in common was that they were all Brune nobles, disdained Regin, hated Tigre and held even the intent to kill towards these two. In this place where they were all comrades, it was not necessary to hide their negative feelings. The men's eyes were dark and impure, and their looks were awfully distorted.

The man, who would be the oldest among them, said in an indifferent voice.

"Tigrevurmud Vorn seems to have arrived at the capital. There is also the Zhcted army."

"Mr. Hero's triumphal return, huh. And those Zhcted's dogs, how conceited of them."

A different man spat that out with a bitter face.

"Even now, I can't believe that that brat had challenged Duke Thenardier head on and moreover won. Are you sure he didn't hide in the shadow and shot a poisoned arrow?"

"It's possible. As if he could fight against Roland and Duke Thenardier with only a bow and arrows."

"Or he might have taken credit after having been helped by the Zhcted army."

Two, three people severally slandered and scorned Tigre. For them, Tigre was a small noble of a remote region without any ability, Zhcted's marionette and a shameless person toadying to Regin. Not to mention the youth's bow skill, they

did not intend to recognize even his achievements of the battlefield.

The oldest man who started the talk turned a cold gaze to them, but he did not try to blame them. Shifting his gaze onto a different man, he asked in a calm tone.

“Is it certain that Earl Vorn and the Zhcted army will stay for three days in the royal palace?”

When the oldest man uttered these words, those who were disparaging Tigre until then closed their mouths all at once. The man who was asked the question nodded and answered.

“There’s no doubt. I think that it’s exactly the time required to prepare arms and food.”

In response to his words, the oldest man looked around at his comrades and calmly said.

“We will proceed as planned. By the fact that Earl Vorn has come to the royal palace, Princess Regin’s mind would probably relax. And Earl Vorn too would without a doubt feel relieved entering the royal palace.”

They had three goals. The rescue of Melisande locked up in one room of the royal palace. Tigre’s assassination. And, catch Regin, hold her hostage and eventually kill her.

They did not have any guilty feelings. For them, Regin was a fake princess and Melisande was the lord they should look up to. They believed that more than Regin who had a strange past of having been raised as a Prince, Melisande who also inherited the royal blood was indubitably the one suitable to be the Princess.

They could not also ignore Tigre’s existence. In the case that they killed only Regin, they suspected that Tigre might genuinely invite the Zhcted army in and sell Brune over to them.

“The targets are only Vorn and Regin, right? And we should leave Mashas Rodant, Hugues Augre and Pierre Badouin as is, is that it?”

One man raised his hand and asked so as to confirm. Having answered his

question was a different person.

“Their despotism is also due to Regin and Vorn’s existence. What is vital is to cut off the root.”

“What do we do about the Zhcted people? Regin is probably going to offer them to stay and entertain them.”

“Ignore them. If Earl Vorn dies, the Zhcted army will lose their reason to stay in our country. And then, Melisande-sama will negotiate with them in due form.”

When the oldest man answered so, one of the men nodded in approval.

“We aren’t many, too. So, we should narrow our goals as such.”

A different man who heard these words raised an objection as he could not conceal his dissatisfaction.

“Though it’ll be no use even if I say it now, why don’t we increase our numbers a little more? There should be more people that can’t tolerate Regin and Vorn’s existences.”

“That’s not possible. If we increase it further, it will definitely be noticed by Badouin. Even as for the current number; precisely because they are pressed by dealing with Sachstein, we are able to keep on covering it.”

“There’s no such thing as impossible to achieve with these numbers.”

The oldest man broke in, in a calm tone. Due to that, the two men suppressed their outburst and reseated themselves respectively in their seat. After a short pause, the oldest man asked.

“But, wasn’t there still a person whom we were waiting for an answer from?”

“We’re expecting to get an answer by this evening.”

When the man, who was asked the question, answered, the man who objected to the numbers a little while ago uttered a voice of doubt.

“Is it all right? Won’t he come here and leak out our plan.....”

“I haven’t yet told him about the details. Nothing will come out even if they closely question the man. And then, what do we do about Armand. I haven’t yet

told him, either.”

Viscount Armand was the man who obeyed Melisande and destroyed the fake Durandal during the Halo Festival. The oldest man shook his head.

“Just let Armand swim^[4]. Don’t get in contact with him until just before the decisive action. That man pledged allegiance to Melisande-sama. If we explain the situation, he will readily join us.”

To these words, the men surrounding the table silently nodded. Although they did not highly value Armand, they recognized at least his loyalty towards Melisande. Precisely because Melisande also understood that, she favored him, who was only a viscount, and brought him with her to the Halo Festival.

“Speaking of numbers, was there any contact from Nemetacum?”

“Yes. Earl Cotillard seems to have gathered 10,000 soldiers.”

When the oldest man answered, some men revealed smiles which were convinced of their victory.

They, who had Melisande, would gain control of the royal palace from inside and hold Regin hostage. In response to that, Earl Cotillard would head to the capital with 10,000 soldiers. And at that stage, the Sachstein army would openly support Melisande, too. That was their plan.

Melisande would become the new Princess and they would seize power under her. Even if those opposing her were to appear, they could overwhelm them^[5] with 10,000 soldiers at hand.

In addition, there was also the calculation that those, who were following Duke Thenardier before, would probably show will of allegiance to Melisande who was his wife.

“About the people of Zhcted”

The man, who alluded to that a while ago, opened his mouth again.

“There’s the possibility of them protecting Vorn; also the possibility of Vorn escaping to them. I want us to at least decide about how to cope with it in case that happens.”

The men looked at each other. From their viewpoint, it was something possible.

“There’s no helping it. In that case, we’ll have no choice but to kill the Zhcted people.”

“Yes. We might as well accuse Vorn of that crime. Even if we were to expose his head in the capital, we might as well send the rest bottom from the head down to Zhcted.”

“There’s a rumor that Vorn has exchanged a secret agreement with Zhcted. Although it’s a rumor, even if it’s not true, there’s no way that a boy with no power would get Zhcted’s cooperation twice. The talk would get complicated due to the secret agreement and they’d have conflict with Vorn^[6]. Let’s plan as such.”

“I’m fine with that, but that’s just in case we end up getting the Zhcted people involved.”

After saying so as to remind them, the oldest man once again looked around at his comrades.

“I’ll repeat, but the number of comrades we’ve in the royal palace is little. But, to settle it in a short time, we have to do things simultaneously. Our goals are Melisande-sama’s rescue and Princess Regin and Earl Vorn’s assassination. Carry them out thoroughly.”

The men’s meeting was over with these words as the conclusion.



Having welcomed Tigre and the others who entered the royal palace was a young noble called Baron Celpet. He was around his mid-twenties. He was one of the civil officials working in the royal court, but judging from his suntanned and virile face, he looked more like a warrior.

“Nice to meet you, Earl Vorn. I am honored to be able to meet Your Excellency who has highly distinguished military service honors.”

“I am grateful.”

Tigre greeted him as he grasped back the hand held out by Celpet. According to Gerard, Celpet belonged to the so-called neutral faction. He did not actively support Princess Regin, but he did not express dissatisfaction and opposition, either.

People who took such an attitude were by no means few. Originally in Brune, the right of succession to the throne of a Princess was very low. In cases that there were a Princess of the direct lineage and a Prince of a subsidiary lineage, unless there were really extreme circumstances, the Prince of the subsidiary lineage was given priority.

In addition, Regin had lied about her own gender. Until two years ago, she had lived as Prince Regnas. That was what incurred distrust from some nobles.

In order to turn them into her allies, Regin could only continue persuading them steadily while showing she had enough capability as Brune's ruler.

Tigre and company handed their weapons to Celpet. Elen and Valentina also handed him their Dragonic Tools. When he received Tigre's black bow, although Celpet slightly knitted his brows, he said nothing to express it.

When they arrived before the audience's room, Celpet bowed and walked away. Titta, Lim and Rurick would wait at this place; only six people including Tigre would go in.

The soldiers who stood on both sides of the door slowly opened it. While feeling slightly tense, Tigre went through the door.

Courtiers were arrayed on both sides of the spacious room, and one girl was sitting down on the throne at the back. It was Princess Regin. On her sides, there was an old man with looks harking back to a cat, and a woman with a silver breastplate wearing a sword to her waist. They were the Prime Minister Badouin and Serena acting as Regin's guard.

While bathing in the courtiers' gazes, Tigre walked straight.

Suddenly, among the courtiers he noticed the figure of Viscount Augre, and felt a sense of security. He was Gerard's father and, alongside Mashas, an old man that Tigre could depend on. He was the feudal lord of Territoire, but now

he worked in the royal palace after having received a request from Regin and others.

Tigre went down on his knee at a fixed place.

“Tigrevurmud Vorn. I have returned from Zhcted.”

Regin’s words were uttered after a short pause of about 3 seconds.

“—First of all, we shall rejoice for having been able to meet again safely like this. I have heard from the Prime Minister about the matter of Asvarre and your victory after the battle against the Sachstein army. You have really done well for our country. Let’s give blessings to the livings and prayers to the deceased.”

The Princess’ voice was calm and was even tinged with a somehow brush-off sound. Driven by unexpected feelings, Tigre softly raised his face. Things like emotion were not visible on her face.

---Or does she deliberately suppress her emotions?

He did not think that Regin had changed. If so, then Mashas and Gerard should have told him. As he thought that he should just confirm it later, Tigre silently bowed his head.

“‘Moonlight Knights army’ is quite a good naming, eh.”

Regin suddenly said so in a casual tone. Immediately after, low noises occurred among the courtiers. However, it did not become something big and the audience room immediately regained its silence.

Next, Mashas, Bouroullec and Scheie went down on their knees in front of Regin. Just like during Tigre’s turn, Regin gave words of gratitude to them.

Elen and Valentina also went down on their knees. Although the two women were not Regin’s retainers, they understood the need of paying their respect to her. Elen ended with only the formal/typical greeting, but Valentina did not let it end with only greetings.

“Taking this opportunity, I would like to ask something to your Highness the Princess. Regarding this war with Sachstein, what kind of end does your Highness anticipate?”

Valentina asked showing no signs of being hesitant and without breaking her

graceful attitude. Some courtiers turned gazes filled with great interest to Regin. The black-haired Vanadis continued.

“We were ordered by the King of our country and went up to here in order to assist your Highness. However, unless we know what to aim for, it will be impossible to move. Should we clean up the Sachstein army from the land of Brune? Or — raise an army and invade Sachstein?”

Still down on his knee, Tigre turned a look of surprise towards the black-haired Vanadis. Valentina was composed, even revealing a smile on her lips; as if enjoying Regin’s reaction.

“You are right. I cannot afford not to tell it to the alliance partner.”

Regin replied in a quiet calm voice.

“I do not think about invading Sachstein. It is not because of lack of reserve power, but because I have a different plan. Because it will affect my country’s political affairs, I cannot reveal it now, but.....”

“No, just having heard these words is enough for me. I am thankful.”

Valentina respectfully bowed. Regin looked around at Tigre and company and said.

“A welcoming banquet will be opened at night. Please, relax in the rooms prepared for you until then.”

After the audience was over, Tigre was guided to a guest room by Baron Celpet. Titta’s room was near Tigre’s. Elen and the Zhcted group were guided to rooms located on a different floor.

When Celpet left, Tigre, still dressed in his formal clothes, threw himself down on the big bed. The fatigue which had accumulated in his body felt like it had begun to blow at a stretch. Then, he realized that his clothes had become wrinkled, but he re-thought “who cares about that”. His hair was also disheveled, but he left it as is.

He inclined his face. Though the sun should have passed the zenith, the sunlight coming in through the window was still bright. It was probably around

early afternoon.

The door was lightly knocked on from outside and Titta's voice was heard. When Tigre replied still lying down as is, the maid with chestnut-color hair, as soon as she entered the room, rebuked the youth as she saw him like that.

"Tigre-sama, that's bad manners."

"I'll think about manners tomorrow. So, please let me lay down as is today."

"Then, how about you drink some tea before sleeping? A hot bath has already been prepared, too."

She had probably asked for arrangements for a hot bath during the time when Tigre and company were meeting with Regin. The youth raised his body while being thankful for her consideration. He smiled at Titta.

"That's a good idea. I guess I'll have one cup."

As Titta replied "yes", she went back to her room for a moment and immediately came back with the necessary tools. Before long, she held out a porcelain cup filled with tea in front of Tigre.

Tigre, who thanked her and took the porcelain cup, unintentionally smelled the fragrance of the rising steam and made a wondering face.

"This isn't the one you usually brew for me."

"I received it from Lyudmila-sama the other day."

To the glad-looking Titta's words, the youth was reminded of the blue-haired Vanadis' gentle smile.

Probably because she boasted of the Vanadis lineage which started from her great-grandmother, and was burdened with it herself, Lyudmila — Mila had a serious side in her that took a severe attitude towards others.

But, she was by no means only that much of a person. Just like this tea, she also possessed kindness as to warm one's heart.

Feeling like he was cheered up not only by Titta, but also by Mila, Tigre curled his lips into a smile. Titta also smiled as she saw her master's face, and the room was wrapped in a peaceful atmosphere.

“Speaking of which, Regin-sama..... How was her Highness the Princess?”

While hurriedly correcting herself to ‘her Highness the Princess’, Titta asked. Before, although a short period, Titta had taken care of Regin. Regin did not behave high-handedly towards Titta, and the two girls opened to each other little by little.

“I was only able to greet her, but she seemed to be looking well.”

While tasting the tea, Tigre answered so without changing his expression. He honestly talked about what he thought, so as to not worry Titta. Besides, he might learn something at the place of the banquet.

---I might as well spend my time leisurely like this until the banquet, I guess.

He thought so for a brief moment, and as if blowing away that thought, the door was knocked on from outside. As he held back, Titta who was about to go to the door, with his hand, Tigre stood up. He put the porcelain cup, which still half of the tea remained in, on the table and walked to the door.

When he opened the door, a man wearing gray official clothes stood there. He was one of the chamberlains serving in the royal court.

“I am sorry to disturb you as you are resting, your Excellency. But, her Highness the Princess is calling you.”

He could not decline it as it was a summon from Regin. Rummaging his darkish red hair, Tigre pulled himself together.

“Let’s go immediately. Where is her Highness?”

When the youth asked so, he noticed that the chamberlain was frowning. It looked like he was bothered by Tigre’s wrinkled clothes and his disheveled hair. But, the chamberlain did not voice that and turned his back on Tigre.

“She is in the audience room. I shall guide you there.”

Tigre cocked his head in puzzlement. If it was the audience room, didn’t he go there just a while ago? But, there were no signs that the chamberlain made a mistake.

Anyway, he had to go since he has been called. Tigre asked the chamberlain to wait and turned to look at Titta. As she probably heard it, although she made

a disappointed face only slightly, she immediately revealed a smile and walked to Tigre. She quickly arranged the youth's disheveled hair.

"Tigre-sama. Please, make sure not to act rude to her Highness the Princess."

"I'll be careful. I'll properly tell about you as well."

When he gently stroked Titta's head instead of bowing, Tigre left the room.

While giving a sidelong glance at the flower bed and garden which colored the pillared corridor's exterior, he walked within the royal palace guided by the chamberlain. In the meantime, the youth regained his calm and thought about Regin.

He remembered her attitude which was that of work (work-like attitude) during the audience. It was not her behavior that Tigre knew of. Have there been some sort of reason and she would talk about it from here on?

They arrived in front of the audience room. When they opened both sides of the door, the inside was empty as there was nobody. The chamberlain unconcernedly went through the door and walked to the back, and Tigre followed him too.

As they went past the throne, the chamberlain stopped before a door at the back.

"Her Highness is waiting beyond this door."

Beyond this door should be the balcony where one could look out over the northwest of the capital. Tigre thanked the chamberlain and opened the door. He walked down a long and narrow corridor and came out to the balcony.

Under the clear blue sky, red and orange-colored roofs shone as they bathed in the spring sunlight.

The waterworks supplying water to the capital, the temple worshipping the Heaven God Perkūnas, the open space displaying the stone statue of the founder Charles in the center and the like could be seen. If looking closely, one might see the figures of many stalls, people walking the Main Street and minstrels.

On the edge of Tigre's view, golden hair fluttering in the wind was reflected.

The girl standing at the balcony and looking down at the cityscape of the bustling capital turned to look his way while smoothing her hair upwards. Needless to say, it was Regin.

Her blue eyes seemed to have shine for an instant, but that might have been Tigre's imagination. When she turned her whole body towards the youth, Regin had the same expressionless face just like when he saw her during the audience. Tigre could not help but feel slight dejection.

The blond-haired Princess said in a somewhat businesslike tone.

"I am sorry to have expressly called you here. I wanted to ask you something after all."

"What do you want to know?"

"What you have accomplished in Asvarre; then, about the battle with Sachstein the other day. As I said during the audience, I have received the report from the Prime Minister, but I want to hear the story from you. And also, about how you lived in Zhcted."

Regin's voice was flat as if dealing with work, but only when she uttered the last lines did it shake subtly. Her pair of blue eyes which were staring straight at Tigre was turned to the balcony's gray floor when she finished speaking. Her expression looked like it was enduring something.

"Your Highness..... By any chance, do you not feel well?"

Although Tigre called out to her as he was worried, Regin shook her head.

"That's not it. More importantly, the story—"

"I understand....."

Though he was not convinced by her answer, he could not possibly afford to cross-examine the Princess. While recalling the events in Asvarre, Tigre began to explain.

When he began to talk about his encounter with Matvey and Olga, the man called Tallard, about Prince Germaine and Prince Elliot, and Sofya — Sofy's rescue, Tigre was able to properly talk about it better than he thought as various things were recollected in his mind.

Regin basically kept quiet playing the listener's role, and if there was something she was concerned about, she would ask a question. What she was especially interested in was about Tallard and Princess Guinevere.

"I have also heard about Lord Tallard. It is said that he's someone who possesses great qualities as both a General and a ruler."

"That's right. He has a strong will for aiming higher. I think that he will definitely become an important existence in Asvarre."

Tallard had the ambition of becoming King. After having hesitated as to whether he should touch that subject, he used an indirect expression. However, it was useless consideration.

"There are also rumors saying that he has a lovers' relationship with Princess Guinevere and that he will become King in the future."

To Regin's words, Tigre stared at her with a dumbfounded face. The blond-haired Princess indifferently squinted as she saw the youth's reaction.

After having asked more about Tallard and Guinevere, Regin moved to the next topic.

Before talking about the battle with Sachstein, Tigre reported about having received a reward of gold coins and carriages from the Zhcted King Victor. The reason why he did not talk about it during the audience was in order to avoid causing useless suspicion.

When Regin bent her head slightly to one side and wandered her gaze in midair, she said in a tone as if talking about something very natural.

"Then, our country shall also give you a reward of an equivalent amount to Zhcted's or more."

Tigre became speechless. As he imagined the scene of a swarm of carriages fully loaded with barrels packed with gold coins surrounding his mansion, he felt cold sweat on his spine.

The gold coins aside, he also had to take care of the horses and also maintain the carriages.

There was no way that he would rudely handle something given to him by a

King and a Princess. Even just the reward from King Victor, honestly speaking, was too much for him. Furthermore if he received an equivalent amount of reward from Regin, Tigre would probably collapse out of anxiety.

“It is too great an honor, but your Highness. The reason why I proceeded to Asvarre was because of King Victor’s request. Of course, I also thought that it was for the sake of Brune, but...”

“It is a fact that your achievements raised Brune’s honor. If I do not reward you properly for that, my ability as a ruler will be questioned.”

What Regin said was reasonable. If achievements were not properly evaluated, it would certainly bring about a distortion. As for Tigre, if the soldiers that he brought from Alsace distinguished themselves militarily, he would have to give them a reward, and he would not be troubled no matter how much money it was.

However, after having said up to there, Regin seemed to have noticed that the youth was troubled. After a short pause, she continued her words.

“.....That said, you also have the achievement of having repelled the Sachstein army that attacked from the south. Regarding the concrete contents of the reward, we will decide it some other time later. Well then, may I hear about the battle against Sachstein?”

“Certainly!”

While heaving a sigh of relief, Tigre quickly put his thoughts in order. He began to explain from when he returned from Zhcted and succeeded in joining safely with Mashas. He then talked without hiding the fact that he borrowed Valentina’s wisdom in the fight against the enemy General Kreuger.

Regin frowned as she was pondering about something.

“I believe that I know Lady Eleonora’s personality to some extent. What kind of person is Lady Valentina?”

“Even I do not know her very well, but..... If one were to speak about effectiveness, she is someone who possesses decisiveness, not hesitating even if she has to use severe means.”

“Zhcted really is a treasure house of talented people, eh.”

Regin sighed as she looked towards the capital’s cityscape. Tigre thought that he totally agreed with her, but he avoided voicing it out. This was because the Princess was visibly depressed.

“From what I seen thus far, there is nobody who is not known of the Vanadises. So, when something is up, if you could just have me as a messenger, then—”

Tigre said that intending to cheer her up, but he swallowed his words halfway. This was because the expression of Regin looking at him clearly changed to a displeased one.

“Earl Vorn, you really have the confidence of being liked by the Vanadises, eh.”

“Many things happened, so well, as such.....”

When he replied so evasively, Regin became more and more displeased.

“Think about your way of speaking. Or else, it will just affirm the worthless rumor spreading inside and outside the royal palace.”

“It was careless of me. I am sorry.”

The youth deeply bowed his head. Regin’s way of talking was severe, but was right. Above all, this rumor would also cause trouble to Elen and the others. He should have refrained from doing something that would make people doubt him.

“—Be careful from now on.”

Regin said as she interrupted the short silence. Tigre raised his face while being thankful.

“I understand well about the battle with Sachstein. I will speak about another matter, but—”

Changing her tone into a new one, Regin shifted the topic.

“After this war ends, could you work in the royal palace?”

Her blue eyes calmly stared at Tigre. “It finally came, huh”, Tigre thought.

“I am thankful for your kind offer, but I am just a country-bred small noble who knows nothing about the royal palace. If such a person were to work in the royal palace, the noble feudal lords already working in there would not feel good about it. Above all, I love Alsace where I was born and raised.”

Though there was also the fact that it was something he thought of beforehand, since those were his honest feelings, Tigre was able to answer without stammering. But, Regin did not easily withdraw, too.

“If there are people unhappy about this, I will take measures regarding them. Also, I did not say not to return to Alsace. You could go back only during summer or winter every once in a year.”

“—Princess”

While consciously restraining his voice, Tigre asked.

“Your Highness, could you please tell me your thoughts about why you invited me to work in the royal palace?”

One could think of several reasons. The fact that in the current Brune, there was no one with distinguished military services ranking equal with Tigre’s. And the fact that the Brune noble with the most interactions with Zhcted was Tigre.

Furthermore, among Regin’s close aides, there were people close to Tigre such as Mashas and Augre. If Tigre were to work in the royal palace, their positions would become strong, too.

During the time before he arrived at the capital, Tigre had talked with Mashas about things to come. The gray-bearded old Earl too did not deny the possibility of Tigre leaving Alsace and working in the royal palace. The bases of that reasoning were these.

However, these were, to the bitter end, what Tigre and Mashas expected.

Tigre wanted to hear the thoughts of Regin herself.

Sure enough, the answer that came out of the blond-haired Princess’s mouth was not beyond the level of the youth’s expectations.

Regin cited his brilliant victories in Brune’s civil war two years ago, the fight against Muozinel which occurred in the midst of it, Asvarre’s civil war last year

and the battle against Sachstein the other day.

Moreover, Tigre had interactions with people of Zhcted as well as Asvarre, and the fact that he was highly evaluated by them added to his lack of selfishness and the tolerance of people and soldiers.

“I want a person like you to be by my side.”

With a face which could not hide his confusion, Tigre stared at Regin who concluded like so.

She did not say anything wrong. But, Regin’s words reached the youth’s ears as a somewhat empty thing, which was similar to reading a tasteless sentence aloud.

“.....Can you give me some time to think about it?”

While taking his eyes off Regin and staring at the gray floor, Tigre answered like so. Cold wind blew between the two people. After the blond-haired Princess answered “I understand” with an emotionless voice, as if having thought that that alone was not enough, she continued her words.

“I am sorry for having such a talk with you even though you just came back to Brune. I guess I was hasty, eh.”

And then, Regin said that she wanted Tigre to give her his answer another time after the war with Sachstein was over, and Tigre nodded.



Around the time when Tigre was talking with Regin in the balcony at the back of the audience room, Elen was already getting bored in the room assigned to her.

Usually, she could keep still for a whole day when she felt that it was necessary. But now, she could not just behave herself for some reason. When one thought that she would lie down on the bed, she got up and walked about meaninglessly in the room.

When looking at the large mirror set against the wall, her face which became increasingly dissatisfied was reflected there.

Now that she was a guest of the royal palace, she was exposed to unpleasant gazes and could not move around freely. Aware of it, she intended to be in their care, but her discomfort was more than expected.

If she were to try going to see Tigre now, that alone would cause suspicion. Even if she only wanted to chat with him, some of the people in this royal palace would not believe that.

She thought about having chess prepare for her, calling Lim who was in the next room and killing time with her by playing it, but she did not feel inclined to do that. She felt sorry for having to make Lim keep her company now.

Suddenly, a smile like that of a child who thought of a prank appeared on Elen's lips. The silver-haired Vanadis picked up the bell put on the table and called the maid as she lightly rang it. After a short time, a middle-aged maid with a fine bodily build appeared.

"Princess, how may I help you?"

Elen unintentionally smiled wryly. Though it was not wrong, the naming "Princess" felt kind of weird. To the maid who made a wondering face, Elen smiled as to say 'never mind'.

"Keeping still like this is boring, you see? I heard that there are many gardens and flower beds with a good view in this royal palace. Can I have you guide me there?"

"Understood. In this season, colorful flowers have bloomed in all the gardens, so I think that you will definitely enjoy yourself."

The good natured maid smiled broadly and began to walk along the corridor guiding Elen. While following after the maid, Elen apologized in her mind to her. The silver-haired Vanadis' purpose was something different from the flowers.

They walked along the long corridor, turned at the corners several times and came out of the pillared corridor. Elen and the maid were viewing a garden, where the stone statues of various Kings were displayed, and the courtyard was colored by a flower bed. While ignoring most of the maid's thorough explanation and pretending to view the stone statues and flowers, Elen sounded out presences.

As she had thought, there were people tailing them while keeping a certain distance.

---There are two. But, they don't seem to be acting together.

Probably among the two people who were watching them, one was good at tailing. As she ran her eyes while pretending to be careless and looking puzzled, she saw that he was hiding himself in the shade.

However, the other one did not show at all any of such openings. Although she felt his/her gaze, she could not easily grasp his/her clear position.

---Maybe the one who sucks at tailing is a decoy in order to make me let my guard down, and the skillful one is the real thing?

So far, she has waited and seen how the other party would act, but it looked like they did not intend to leave. So Elen thought that she might as well just come into contact with them.

Elen carefully measured the distance to the person hiding in the shade. She got one flower from the maid and while behaving as if enjoying its fragrance, she walked down the corridor, shortening the distance to the other party. As they seemed to think that they were not noticed, the other party did not move from where they were.

She kicked the floor. With a speed like that of a bird of prey springing at its prey, Elen went around in front of the other party.

It was a face she recognized. If she was not mistaken, it was the man called Celpet who had guided them to the audience room. His suntanned face stiffened as he was taken aback.

“You’ve been sneakily following me since a little while ago; what exactly do you want? If it’s that you’ve been fascinated by me, you shouldn’t be reserved and look at me from the front.”

While throwing an oppressive sneer, Elen thrust the flower she held in her hand into the tip of Celpet’s nose. Unable to hide his confusion, Celpet shook his head as he uttered a groan.

“No, you are wrong, Vanadis-dono. There are circumstances for doing

this.....”

“Baron Celpet, isn’t it? I’ll listen to you. Depending on the contents, I may report it to Her Highness Princess Regin. Of course, even if you try to deceive me...”

While oozing sweat on his forehead, Celpet explained that he has been following Elen in order to protect her.

“I am ashamed of having you listen about my country’s disgrace, but there are people who are extremely cautious just of the fact that you are a person from Zhcted. I intended to immediately stop them if they were to needlessly meddle with Vanadis-dono, so I followed you.”

“I see, I’m thankful for that. However, I haven’t heard anything from Her Highness Princess Regin though. By whose instructions do you act as my guard?”

“Of course, it is of my own free will. For Brune, Zhcted is a valuable ally. We must avoid a situation where a crack appears in our relationship of mutual trust. Moreover if I have to express it, it is naturally my duty as a man to protect a beautiful woman like you from a disaster.”

Perhaps because he’d regained his calm, Celpet span his words smoothly along with gestures. Elen looked at the young baron as her ruby-colored pupils revealed a color of amazement. Even if it was a lie of evasion, it was impressive how he was able to say this much at once.

“Sorry, but I’m already aware of the circumstances you speak of. On top of that, I’m here in this royal palace. I took this rare opportunity to admire flowers, so I would like you to refrain from doing something like spoiling my pleasure.”

As she said that over her shoulder, Elen turned her feet to the garden. Celpet called out to her back.

“Vanadis-dono. If it is fine with you, I would like you to tell me one thing, but.....”

Elen stopped, cocked her head in puzzlement and turned only her gaze to the man. Without wiping the sweat going along his face, Celpet uttered a question with a tense expression.

“Two years ago, why did you cooperate with Earl Vorn, a foreigner?”

“What will you do after hearing it?”

“I want to know. I have heard that in the Zhcted Kingdom, Vanadises are existences second only to the King and that they can move several thousands of soldiers by their own will. If not for your cooperation, Earl Vorn would not be here now. However.....”

As if inquiring about Elen’s reaction, Celpet cut his words here. Elen silently received the man’s gaze and urged him to continue. After licking his lips with his tongue, Celpet opened his mouth.

“I do not know the reason why you lent him your power. You met Earl Vorn for the first time on the battlefield of Dinant two years ago. You had no interaction with him before that. In other words, in just a mere dozens of days, something happened between you and Earl Vorn; to the extent of generously lending him several thousands of soldiers.”

As he talked, Celpet’s eyes were tinged with heat and emitted a strange brightness. Elen, revealing a fed up expression, asked the man in a rough tone.

“So, what do you think has happened?”

Noticing that he aroused Elen’s anger, Celpet waved both his hands left and right in panic.

“Precisely because I do not know that, I would like you to tell me. What did Earl Vorn, who is just a youth ruling a territory in the frontier, offer to you? Did he have anything which satisfied you? If he did not, what kind of words or sentiments did you two exchange?”

Until Celpet had finished speaking, Elen had to control herself so as to not crush the flower which she held in her right hand. In short, this man was suspicious of whether there might have been a relationship of man and woman between Elen and Tigre.

---No, he might be provoking me by pretending to think so.

No matter what the other party’s intention was, she was used to this kind of people. Elen looked at Celpet with an especially gentle smile.

“If you want to hear it that much, then I’ll answer. I was touched by Earl Vorn’s sincere feelings, his desire to want to save the people of his territory. I too was given a dukedom by His Majesty King Victor, you see? So, I understand well the feelings of trying to protect one’s people.”

The young nobleman with fearless features stared at Elen with a bored face. As if to say that those were not the words he wanted to hear. The silver-haired Vanadis continued her words without minding it.

“Although, I don’t intend to demand each and everyone’s understanding. At that time, there were quite a few people who shrank back as they were struck by Duke Thenardier’s and Duke Ganelon’s influence/power after all.”

Celpet raised his eyebrows to the bitter sarcasm. Elen did not know whom Celpet followed in the civil war two years ago. But, she knew at least that he was not in the “Silver Meteor Army”. That alone was enough for now.

As words of rebuttal did not seem to come from Celpet at once, Elen turned her back this time for sure.

“It’s good to be curious, but time is limited. Shouldn’t one endeavor in their self-improvement so as to be able to borrow help from the surroundings when they’re in trouble?”

No longer having any business with him, Elen walked to the garden with calm steps. Behind her, Celpet’s footsteps went away.

Though Elen drove away a troublesome person, her position, far from improving, grew worse. This was because the other person who was watching Elen was walking her way while making a small applause.

“I’ve unintentionally listened to your talk. That was quite a skillful speech Eleonora.”

With long black hair and a pure white dress decorated with flowers. It was Valentina.

“I now understand well how dearly you think of Earl Vorn.”

Elen stopped and turned a dangerous look to her. She did not know what Valentina was thinking about. But, she felt it necessary to properly make

Valentina understand that she by no means moved only by her feelings towards Tigre.

“The anger, sorrow and grief of having one’s territory being damaged and trampled on by lawless people. These are feelings that anyone, who has a territory which they should rule, would harbor. There’s no way that you, a Vanadis, wouldn’t understand it.”

“Yes, I understand that. But, I think that his question was reasonable. Can you make a decision to go save Alsace just because of your righteous indignation?”

Bending her head slightly to one side, Valentina innocently asked. Elen folded her arms and revealed a smile seeming to want to say “so that’s it”.

“I was able to confirm it with my own eyes the other day that it was worth it.”

What appeared in her mind was the scene of the welcome that they received when they passed Alsace the other day.

In the future, when a person of LeitMeritz might go on a trip to Brune, they would receive a favorable response from the people of Alsace.

Also for the people of LeitMeritz, if they went through the Vosyes Mountains and could have the conviction that they could feel relieved in Alsace, they would definitely pass through Alsace as much as possible.

Elen understood how necessary it was to have a place where they could feel relieved for those travelling. And, this was conformed to Elen’s goal of developing a Vosyes Mountain road and strengthening interchanges between Brune and Zhcted.

But, she did not intend to expressly explain that to Valentina. Elen changed the topic and bluntly threw a question at her.

“More importantly, why were you following me?”

“I was getting bored after all.”

While putting her hands together in front of her abundant chest, Valentina calmly answered.

“I slipped out of my room and intended to walk around the royal palace. Then, I happened to see you walking to the corridor, so I couldn’t help it.”

As she shook her shoulders, Elen glared at Valentina. She earnestly had to endure the impulse of wanting to shout at her.

“What do you intend to do if the Brune people saw your suspicious movements and suspected that you might be scheming something? Don’t do something which will cause Tigre trouble.”

“I see that you really like Earl Vorn, Eleonora.”

Warding off Elen’s rebuke while repressing her voice, with a smile, Valentina put a hand on her cheek and happily stared at the silver-haired Vanadis. Elen, not retorting immediately, folded her arms and took her eyes off Valentina.

“Do you want to insist on the fact that I like Tigre no matter what?”

“Weren’t you having such an intimate relationship during the Sun Festival? You even linked arms.”

“If you’re talking about linking arms, even Lyudmila has done so, right? I don’t want to do something like causing trouble to an ally. I’m only thinking that.”

“If you really think so, you shouldn’t be considerate towards Earl Vorn, but tell him that, right? That Brune shouldn’t cause us trouble by doing foolish things.”

Elen revealed a sour face. She could not help but admit that Valentina’s words were correct. Elen reluctantly rebutted.

“Strangers being disliked is the way of the world. It isn’t really like we’ll stay here for many days.”

“It isn’t really like you; that’s a quite pessimistic way of thinking. How about you try talking about this now to Earl Vorn and asking him?”

“.....Valentina. You seem to be misunderstanding something.”

Holding down her rising irritation, Elen, feigning composure, continued her words.

“Tigre and I are comrades in arms. I also trust both his skills and personality, but it isn’t the type of relationship that you’re thinking about.”

“Oh my, then do I, who has thoroughly been seen in my birthday suit and whose body has been felt by him, have a deeper relationship with him?”

“What are you talking about?”

Elen unconsciously lowered her voice. She knew that Tigre had some awkward parts to him and thought that there was no helping it if it was something caused by accident or carelessness; but she wondered whether he has done anything even to Valentina.



The black-haired Vanadis exaggeratedly shrugged her shoulders and took one step back.

“Eleonora, your face is scary, you know?”

“Enough with my face; just tell me this in detail. I’m an ally of Tigre. So it’s necessary for me to know if he misbehaved.”

“It isn’t that serious as to be called misbehavior. It was just to the extent of a young man and woman staring at and touching each other’s naked bodies. Please do not mind it, Eleonora.”

Looking at Valentina who chuckled, Elen finally realized that she was being teased. She did not intend to answer from the beginning.

---There’s no need to force her to spill the beans. I should just ask Tigre later.

Elen sighed and turned her gaze to the garden. Her eyes met with the middle-aged maid’s who had guided her to here. She bowed to Elen and Valentina with a smile seeming to want to say “please, take your time”.

While returning the maid’s greeting, Valentina said to Elen.

“Do you not consider using this situation?”

“What do you mean?”

To the abrupt and vague question, Elen knitted her brows. The black-haired Vanadis chuckled.

“I am talking about your beloved Earl Vorn. There are people who want to remove him from Brune, right? If you use them, wouldn’t you be able to bring Earl Vorn back with you to your dukedom?”

Let the Brune nobles drive Tigre out. Valentina was implying that. Elen narrowed her eyes and revealed a smile of contempt.

“You really like using such means. But, I don’t like it.”

“That’s a commendable attitude, but if you keep acting like that, will you not end up losing someone important to people who do not hesitate to use such means? He seems to be quite popular after all.”

Valentina’s lines struck Elen where it hurt. The scene, where the other

Vanadis were acting intimately with Tigre during the Sun Festival, flashed across the silver-haired Vanadis's mind.

Even during the audience with Regin, Elen did not fail to notice the good will towards Tigre blurring in the princess's blue pupils. Although she briefly praised the naming of "Moonlight Knights army", Elen thought that that was the overflowing of goodwill she was not able to contain.

Perhaps because Elen remained silent, the black-haired Vanadis continued her words.

"As for me, in order to obtain something I want, means do not matter. After all, I understand that I am not capable enough to be able to choose the means."

The wind which blew from the garden fluttered the two women's hair.

When Elen was going to say something, Valentina moved before that.

"I guess I will go back. As expected, I got tired."

As she passed through the silver-haired Vanadis's side, the black-haired Vanadis walked down the corridor.

Elen did not think of calling her to halt. She shut her mouth which was about to speak and silently saw her back fading away.

While walking down the corridor after parting from Elen, Valentina Glinka Estes was brooding over what she should do from now on.

---Tigrevurmud Vorn.....

She tried muttering the name of the man, whom she was most interested in now, without voicing it out.

In the battle with the Sachstein army led by General Kreuger, there was only one disappointing thing for Valentina.

It was the fact that Tigre did not use the black bow's power. Even though he should have been able to blow off the Hill Fort along with Kreuger if he had used that power.

For Valentina, in this opportunity where she's acting together with Tigre, she

wanted to confirm how powerful the black bow's power was.

---Does it mean that it will be no use if he isn't cornered a little more?

As expected, if his life was in danger, even Tigre would not hesitate about using the black bow's power. And fortunately for her, there were materials which seemed to be usable in this royal palace.

---Was he called Baron Celpet?

Valentina recalled the face of the young nobleman who guided them to the audience room and was dealt with by Elen a little while ago.

It was the man whom the duty of guiding them until the audience room was entrusted to. There was no doubt that the usual Celpet had a favorable behavior towards Tigre and the people of Zhcted.

However, the black-haired Vanadis knew about it; about the fact that Celpet, who behaved politely, turned eyes tinged with strong negative feelings towards Tigre for a moment. It was probably only Valentina who was obliquely observing Celpet's expression and attitude, that did not miss it.

---Although he lined up to Elen words putting in doubt her relationship with Earl Vorn.

That was quite unnatural, too. Also when coupling it with his gaze towards Tigre, she wondered whether Celpet suspected the darkish red-haired youth of being a pawn of Zhcted.

---I guess I'll shake him a little.

As Valentina, who returned to her room, called a maid and had her prepare a drink, she amused herself in idle chats with her for a while. While having a pleasant chat, Valentina cleverly got information such as which noble was given which room in the royal palace, out from her.

In her head, Valentina drew a map of the royal palace little by little. Her real objective, even when she tailed Elen, was to know about the royal palace's structure even if a little.

After nearly half a koku had passed, the black-haired Vanadis thanked the maid saying "I have enjoyed myself", gave her one gold coin and had her leave.

In the room where she was now alone, Valentina prepared a paper and pen. She wrote down the following sentences in well-ordered Brune words.

『Tigrevurmud Vorn has exchanged with Zhcted a secret agreement of ceding the territory of Brune. The reason why Zhcted is cooperating with him is to obtain a second ‘Agnes’. You should kill Vorn before he leaves the royal palace.』

Agnes was a land in the southeast of Brune. After the civil war two years ago ended in Regin’s victory, King Faron ceded Agnes to Zhcted in his own name. He did it with the intention of not only thanking them for their cooperation, but also using Zhcted as a shield against Muozinel.

After having seen through his intention, Zhcted still got Agnes. This was because if they got Agnes, Zhcted would be exposed/opened to the south sea. That attraction/appeal was great.

But, it was not like every one of the Brune nobles had guessed Faron’s intention. There were those who regarded the cession of the territory as humiliating and that led to doubt towards Regin.

What was left to do was to make it so that this letter reached Celpet’s hands.

Even if Celpet succeeded in killing Tigre, she would not mind it as such. This was because it would no longer be necessary to think about the black bow’s power. Besides, Brune falling into confusion by losing Tigre was also what Valentina wished for.

“About Melisande, I shall let you show me what you’ve got.”

When putting together the story she heard from Tigre, the atmosphere drifting in the royal palace and moreover the information that she’d collected since setting foot in the land of Brune, it seems that Melisande and her faction have not yet given up as they’re planning something.

---Considering the fact that she kept in touch with Sachstein, she will probably take action within a few days. I wonder whether her aim is Her Highness Princess Regin’s life after all.

Valentina guessed several answers about Melisande’s aim^[7], and in addition thought about how to deal with each one of them. Then the black-haired

Vanadis thought that Melisande and her faction's plan was very likely to fail.

While generally thinking in that way, Valentina called the maid and had her prepare a book telling a story. Even though it was written in Brune's language, she could read it without inconvenience.

There was a reason why she expressly had the maid bring a book. Of course, there was also the fact that she liked reading books; but it was mainly because even if she said that she was alone for a long period of time in her room reading a book, she would not be suspected that much.

Valentina's Dragonic Tool Ezendeis had the ability to instantly jump from one space to another.

Unless there was a very urgent business, there was no one who would willfully open a guest room's door. Even if someone were to knock on the door from outside when she was not there, she could just answer either that she did not notice as she was engrossed in reading or that she was tired and fell asleep.

It would be good to instigate Celpet when the whole palace became dark as the day went down, and it became busy with the preparation for the banquet.

As she decided so, Valentina sat down on a chair and opened the book with a smile. She fully enjoyed the story.

Valentina too was by no means omnipotent. She did not foresee that someone with the same purpose as her was secretly acting.



When the day had ended, the banquet was opened in the reception hall. It was to welcome the Zhcted army as friendly troops and celebrate the victory of the battle against Sachstein. A great number of noble feudal lords had already gathered in the hall and musicians were at a corner. Dishes and alcohol were carried in one by one, too.

Many silver chandeliers hung on the ceiling and candlesticks were put alongside the wall at regular intervals. Candles were stuck and lit in all of them,

brightly illuminating the hall.

“I’m sorry, Tigre.”

While looking at the numerous dishes displayed on the table, Mashas sighed.

“This party is also to celebrate your return, but.....”

“No, I’m thankful. After all, I’m not very good at making a speech before many people.”

Tigre cheered up the old Earl as he said so. In fact, being thankful were his true feelings. He had no idea at all of what he should say in a place like this.

“Although it’s different when I’m in charge of the toast in the harvest festival of Alsace or encourage the soldiers on the battlefield.”

“In that area, it’s due to my lack of properly educating you. I’ve no excuse to say to Urz.”

A temporary throne was put at the back of the hall and Durandal was displayed on its side. Seeing Durandal, there were probably many noble feudal lords who remembered the Halo Festival. Of course, it was for that reason that Regin decided to hold the banquet here.

---So, that is the fake Durandal.

Tigre looked at Durandal from far away. The reason why it wasn’t put out at the time when they had an audience with Regin seemed to be because she didn’t want to let it stand out as much as possible.

Perhaps because he knew that it was a fake, the brilliance of the guard and scabbard looked to him more like decorations. And above all, the solemn atmosphere that was on the real one could not be felt on this one.

It was not Tigre’s imagination. The real Durandal, which was handed down from the founder Charles’ imperial reign, possessed a really mysterious power.

The Dragonic Skills released by the Dragonic Tools possessed by Vanadises. Moreover, the attack released by Tigre’s black bow. Durandal’s blade negated all of these manifestations of terrifying power beyond human knowledge.

A question suddenly arose in the youth’s mind.

---Why was Durandal stolen.....?

Mashas surmised that the person who stole Durandal was either Melisande or, even if it was not her, someone connected with her, and that their purpose was probably to damage Regin's authority/power and make it decline. Prime Minister Badouin seemed to be of the same opinion, too.

Tigre too, until he saw the fake one, agreed to Mashas' opinion. He wondered whether they did not think of any reason, why the Kingdom's sacred sword was stolen, other than that.

But, was it really so? Was it not perhaps the doing of someone who knew Durandal's ability?

Tigre however shook his head and drove away that thought, which appeared in his head, into a corner of his consciousness. There was a limit about thinking too much.

At that time, Regin appeared at the throne along with Badouin. Like the other noble feudal lords, Tigre also turned his gaze towards her.

Badouin respectfully held out a silver cup with decorated jewels to Regin. Wine had been filled in the silver cup.

Regin's face which was illuminated by the light of the chandelier and candlesticks, as expected, appeared to lack in emotions. He thought that the dejected expression she had when talking with Tigre in the balcony was better.

While Tigre had Mashas prepare a silver cup and wine, Regin opened her mouth.

"We have defeated the Sachstein troops which were advancing from the south. What is left is only the enemy approaching from the west. I shall admit that they are tough. However, it is not an enemy that we can by no means match. I expect a brave fight from you. —May the gods be the witnesses!"

When Regin raised the silver cup decorated with jewels, the people gathered in the hall also raised their cups.

"To us, victory!"

Tigre also lifted his silver cup. He incidentally turned his gaze to Elen and Lim

who stood in a distant place. Tigre and them talked beforehand and decided to not come in contact as much as possible while being in the royal palace.

Although the youth felt slightly lonely, those feelings of his vanished as he drank up the wine in his silver cup. There were a lot of people that he should meet during this banquet.

“Oh, so you were here.”

As he was called out from the side, Tigre looked there. A small-sized old man wearing a robe stood there. It was Hugues Augre. A joyful smile appeared on Tigre’s face.

“Viscount Augre. It's been a long time.”

“Yes. According to the rumors, it seems that you went not only to Zhcted, but also to Asvarre. I’m glad that you came back safely. Gerard should also be in this hall.”

With his wrinkled face, Augre grasped Tigre’s hand. The youth felt his heart become warm and with just the fact that he was able to meet him again, he thought that he was glad for having come to the royal palace.

Mashas also exchanged a handshake with Augre. Until two years ago, the two men had almost no relations with the royal palace. Mashas governed Aude, Augre governed Territoire and both of them thought that they would finish their life like that.

The wry smiles which appeared on both men’s faces almost at the same time were probably their frank expression towards the quirk of fate.

For Augre, it had only been dozens of days since he met Mashas; but it had indeed been a year since he met Tigre again. There were many things to talk about. But, both of them could not spend the time to only speak about that.

Mashas was called out by other nobles and received them smilingly. Because Augre said that there were people he wanted Tigre to meet, the two of them advanced as they pushed their way through the crowd of people.

Suddenly finding a familiar face among the people engaging in friendly chat, Tigre unintentionally called out to him.

“Isn’t it Auguste? Did you come, too?”

The knight in his prime, who grew an abundant beard from his cheeks to his chin, saluted Tigre with a calm smile. Although his beard emphasized his sternness, his smile had a mysterious charm.

“It has been a long time, Tigre-sama. No, your Excellency Earl Vorn.”

Though Auguste was a knight belonging to the Calvados Knight Squadron, he was born and raised in Alsace. Of course, he was also an old friend to Tigre and Titta.

“Please stop with the formalities at least here in the banquet. I’m glad you’re looking well.”

“I have heard that Tigre-sama has been brilliantly active in various places. In the next battle, by all means please call me and the Calvados Knight Squadron. Everybody will happily follow Tigre-sama.”

“That’s really reliable. At that time, I promise to call you people without fail.”

Then, when Tigre talked about Alsace’s situation, Auguste happily listened to him. He, who belonged to the Knight Squadron, had not yet gone back to his home town in Alsace for many years.

Auguste said that due to some circumstances, he was in the royal palace with his subordinates. In this regard, he ran his gaze in the distance just for an instant. Ahead of his gaze was the figure of Regin. The blond-haired Princess, along with her escort knight, was surrounded by many nobles and, although she had an unenthusiastic expression, she was dealing with them politely/courteously.

While Tigre was talking with Auguste, Augre brought several nobles along. There were the people who were added to the Silver Meteor Army and had fought under Tigre’s command before.

“This time, the title is ‘Moonlight Knights army’, huh. Of course, we shall have you let us fight under you.”

“I’ve already fought against the Sachstein army once and lost, but I will be happy if you can use me.”

They unanimously offered their cooperation to the youth. As for Tigre, it would be reassuring if they, whom he had a congenial relationship with, were there. As he answered “I will be counting on you”, he exchanged handshakes with each and every one of them.

However, he was not able to talk any further with them. Another different group of nobles called out to Tigre. They were the people, who requested to Tigre whether he couldn't have their daughter or cousin beside him and treat them like maids, with letters when he went to Zhcted.

As it was difficult to decline them with such an atmosphere, for the time being Tigre said that he wanted them to wait for a reply until the war with Sachstein was over, and ran away. Augre cut in with a nasty smile.

“How about this, Earl Vorn? Taking charge of the daughters whom those, who fought most bravely on the battlefield, introduced, as maids.”

Though it was clearly said in a joking tone, each of the nobles who heard that made a serious expression and left immediately after saying goodbye.

With a wry smile, Tigre thanked Augre and asked him (Augre) and Auguste about what he suddenly remembered. It was about his mother.

When he asked them whether they knew something, the two men cocked their heads in puzzlement.

“She was a calm and gentle person. I had heard from Urz-sama that she was the daughter of a gardener who was working in the royal palace.”

“At the time when she met Urz, she had no relatives. Of course, they loved each other; but there was also the feeling that he couldn't leave her alone. However, was there something that bothered you?”

“No. It's been a long time since I came to the royal palace, and it made me remember about my mother.”

Tigre played it off as he replied so. In the end, he did not obtain any new information from these two.

---Does my mother have no relation whatsoever with the bow? Speaking of my father, he didn't have any though.

Tigre's father, Urz, was neither as skilled with the bow as his son, nor was he as interested in it. Even about the black bow, he only left the words "use it only when it is really necessary" to Tigre.

Even these words of his, considering that it was an heirloom, Tigre did not think that they included a particularly important meaning. In fact, until two years ago, Tigre had only thought of it as a slightly eerie heirloom.

"Speaking of which, I would like to request one thing to Viscount Augre."

When Tigre requested a certain thing, the small-sized old Viscount nodded with a smile.

"I understand. I'll do it at once."

"Thanks."

"What, it's natural to try to protect one's body by oneself; all the more so in this situation."

After that, too, many nobles showed up before Tigre. Thanks to Mashas, Augre, Auguste and Gerard sticking with the youth by turns, he was somehow able to get through it.

He stopped at only exchanging formal greetings with Elen and Lim. Elen revealed a wry smile as if to say "we both have it tough".

Regin also called out to Tigre. However, she had a quite businesslike attitude and her words, "I'm looking forward to your brave fight" did not seem to be so very full of feelings. Tigre bowed while being careful as to not express his dejection.

Rurick was called out to by Gerard when he was eating dishes with relish while gulping down wine in a corner of the hall.

A fragrant smell rose from the duck meat roasted using spices abundantly and each one of the cheeses ordered from various place in Brune was tasteful. When drinking a mouthful of wine in a situation where the taste of rich cheese remained on the tongue, exquisite acidity spread in the mouth.

Soup with finely cut onions and potatoes washed away the fat inside the

mouth. The Herb stuffed quail meat and herb texture was enjoyable. The sheep's meat that was boiled in grape wine until it was soft was also delicious. Trying to reach the meat no matter what, might be because of youth.

Rurick ended up holding a strange sense of responsibility that he must also eat the shares of Elen, Lim and Tigre who were busy with dealing with various nobles.

“Can’t you at least eat a little properly?”

“It's courtesy to the food to say delicious thing are delicious while savoring it, isn't it?”

To Gerard who dropped sarcasm as usual, Rurick responded while biting a deep-fried shrimp. Speaking of Gerard, he picked up a strawberry served in a small dish.

“It seems that the meaning of the word ‘taste’ is different in Brune and Zhcted. It looks to me like you’re gradually packing food like salary though.”

“I might as well thoroughly tell you my impressions about each flavor. If you bastard don’t mind listening to it with an honest heart, that is.”

“If you tell me with an honest heart as well, I have no hobby of listening to your criticism.”

While continuing the short exchange of sarcasm further, Gerard got to the main point. He explained in a subdued voice about the fact that the royal palace’s atmosphere was not good, and that there was a force holding hostility towards Tigre.

Although there weren’t people paying attention to them in particular, Gerard was clearly a supporter of Regin and Rurick was a person from Zhcted here. They should not be off their guard.

It was originally not the kind of thing to talk about at the place of a banquet, but Gerard expressly visiting Rurick would stand out. Gerard could not think of any better way than slipping in that talk within a friendly chat.

“I don’t think that a person from Zhcted would be targeted, but you never know. If possible, could you tell that yourself to Vanadis-dono? After this

banquet ends or even when leaving the royal palace.....”

“If she was the type of person who would listen to me when I told her, I wouldn’t have cooperated with Lord Tigrevurmud to this point in the first place.”

Rurick shook his head.

“In any case, I give you my thanks. After all, it’s important that I know beforehand so that I may act without hesitation when something happens.”

“Yes. Please do. If you need something, please request it to my father.”

Although the two men had a relationship where they would throw sarcasm with attitude and words at each other whenever they met, they also had a relation where they’d went through fierce battles under Tigre. Their sense of smell was sharp regarding danger.

As he finished saying what was necessary to say, Gerard left the place as if it was nothing, and Rurick returned to his meal.



Only one and a half koku had passed since the beginning of the banquet. The royal palace’s outside was wrapped in darkness and although the moon was still at a low position, it continued rising little by little.

After telling Mashas that he was going back to his room, Tigre left the banquet hall alone. The number of people, who were in the hall then, decreased to less than half. Regin and Elen seemed to have returned to their room, their figures could no longer be seen after all.

Walking down the dim corridor, Tigre headed not to his room, but to the bathhouse. He was recommended so by Mashas when he left the hall. Because he felt mental fatigue, he was thankful for the old Earl’s consideration.

The bathhouse was in a quite distant place from the hall. When he told his name to the chamberlain standing in front of the bathhouse, the man, seeming to have already heard it from Mashas, let him go in.

When entering the bathhouse, first there was a wide changing room. Although called a changing room, it was not only a place to take off clothes. Sake, chessboards and the like were lined up on a shelf, and even a bed for one to lie down on and massage his body was put.

“Well then, please enter the bathroom and wait. I will call someone for washing your body.”

“No, I can do it myself, so it’s fine.”

Tigre shook his head. Although the chamberlain revealed a surprised face, he said no more and slightly went out of the bathhouse.

As he casually took off his clothes, Tigre entered the bathroom only with a thick cloth.

The bathroom which was not narrower than the changing room was dim; the visibility was bad as it was filled with steam. As Tigre approached the bathtub, he went down on his knee on the floor, scooped hot water and poured it on his body.

---Something like this can only be found in a royal palace, I guess.

This luxury of boiling this much hot water by burning a large quantity of firewood only to soak in it, even prosperous nobles or wealthy merchants could not readily afford it. Usually bathing in water while it was warm and wiping his body with a cloth, which hot water was squeezed on, in the winter season was the way of small nobles like Tigre and commoners.

When he washed off his sweat after pouring hot water on himself several times, Tigre suddenly stopped his movements and turned to look behind him.

A silhouette of a person could be seen near the doorway. It seems like someone had come in. Tigre wondered whether the one, who should have washed his body (he declined though), had come in without asking him.

“Who is it?”

He tried calling out, but the silhouette, not replying, just walked his (Tigre) way. Step by step, slowly. It seemed to be careful and nervous.

When finally finding who the person was, Tigre opened his eyes wide in

surprise.

It was Regin. She wound a big thick cloth around her delicate body. As she was nevertheless probably embarrassed, her cheeks were dyed red and she hung her head down so as to not make eye contact with Tigre. She neither screamed nor tried to run away.

Speaking of Tigre, his brain stopped working to the unexpected occurrence as he just looked up at her in blank amazement. Although she covered her body with a cloth, her white slender shoulders, her chest and her slender legs were enough to fan the youth's lust (carnal desires). And his body reacted naturally.

Regin slightly raised her face. Their eyes met. Tigre, who finally came to his senses, turned his back on her in panic. His breathing was rough.

The youth ran his eyes left and right, and grabbed the cloth which he had used when washing his body. He wound it around his waist in a rough way. Considering the movement of Regin's gaze, he probably should not have been seen.

As he took a small breath and regained some calm, Tigre noticed that Regin's presence, which he felt behind him, was unchanged.

---Did she come in by mistake.....?

As he was inwardly puzzled wondering "what does this mean?" and hesitated on whether he should call out to her, Regin was the first to speak.

"—Earl Vorn."

The fact that one could hear that her voice was slightly trembling was only because of the bathroom's structure. When Tigre replied "yes" in a voice tinged with tension, after several seconds Regin once again called the youth's name.

"Lord Tigrevurmud. No..... Tigre."

Tigre's reply was slightly delayed. He was perplexed over Regin having expressly called him by his nickname. Besides, he had the feeling that the voice he heard just now was closer.

The next moment, a soft sensation of wet skin was transmitted onto Tigre's back. When Regin went down on her knees behind the youth, she embraced

him from behind as she pressed her body onto him. Because of too much surprise, Tigre's whole body stiffened.

Two soft bulges hit his back. The sensation of his back, which had increased sharpness from excitement, caught the two sensations of slightly firm protuberance. A hot breath could be felt on the nape of his neck and golden hair tickled it (nape of his neck).

Tigre was about to say something, but his voice did not come out only his chin moving clumsily. Unable to shake himself loose from her, the best he could do was hold the edges of the cloth put around his waist and strongly grasp it in order to endure the impulse/urge welling up from the depths of his body.

In a voice that contained a very small amount of shyness, Regin muttered into the youth's ear.

"At last..... At last, I was able to call you Tigre."

Although Tigre, having not yet recovered from his confusion, was at a loss as he was unable to guess the meaning of her words, he somehow understood that she seemed to want to convey something to him.

"I have wanted to do this when I met you in the audience room."

She put strength in her thin arms which held Tigre tight. "The audience room", Tigre muttered in a blurred voice. Though the youth's consciousness was still mostly held by excitement and confusion, his brain finally began to work again and he carefully listened to the Princess' words.

Regin continued in a voice which mixed joy and frustration/bitterness.

"Welcome you with a smile, take your hand....."

Anything past that was washed away by her welling up feelings and thus was not put into words. But, it was conveyed to the youth. Regin probably wanted to say that she wanted to hug him and be happy that he was safe.

---So, that was it.....

Tigre recalled her expression that he saw in the audience room, balcony and the banquet hall. The reason why it looked like it was devoid of emotions was because she was desperately restraining her feelings.

As he repeated Regin's words in his mind, Tigre hung his head in shame. He felt ashamed of himself that he wasn't able to understand her feelings.

For a short while, Regin silently entrusted her body to Tigre's back and indulged in quiet joy. Tigre too said nothing, and silence wrapped the bathhouse.

The first one unable to endure the silence was Tigre. The current situation was too stimulating to indulge in deep emotion. If they kept still as is, he would want to give himself in to the swelling desire. As his heart continued beating fast and showed no sign of settling down, his body loudly demanded activity.

Even when he tried thinking about something else, Regin's body etched in the back of his eyelids a while ago would appear and disappear. In that case, he would rather exchange words with Regin.

"Y-Your Highness, um, shouldn't you soon....."

'Let go of me?' Tigre was going to continue as such, but Regin spoke before that.

"Tigre. At this time, could you not call me 'your Highness', but Regin? Just Regin."

"Regin, is it.....?"

To the perplexed youth, Regin changed her tone to a slightly stern one and responded. Though a tone like a spoiled child was slightly contained in her voice, Tigre did not notice.

"I am asking you so. Now, please call it."

Although he hesitated, Tigre called her "Regin". Regin slightly laughed on the youth's back. Her two hills slightly bounced and once again stimulated Tigre's back.

"Thank you. I feel like I was finally able to return to my original self."

"I-I see."

Tigre did not yet understand her intentions. So he could only answer as such.

---Still, what does she intend to do if we are found by someone.....?

“Speaking of which, the person who manages this bathhouse.....”

It was at this time that Tigre remembered that there was a chamberlain outside the bathhouse. His face grew pale. In contrast, his abdomen was boiled hot without any change.



“If you’re talking about that man, he isn’t there. I had him leave the place for a while.”

To the flustered Tigre, Regin answered in a tone as if it was nothing.

“I have Serena — the person acting as my guard stand on guard in front of the bathhouse now. Only the three of us, I, you and Serena know that I’m here. No one else will come in here, so please rest assured.”

Though it was not a mental state where he could possibly rest assured, Tigre answered “understood”. He finally understood. Regin came in here in order to talk to him with only the two of them around.

After a short pause, Regin began talking.

It has been approximately one year since she came to govern this country. Regin’s reign was becoming stable. The fact that people, who once again pledged allegiance to her^[8], appeared even without being persuaded by Badouin or Mashas might be said to be the evidence.

But, there were still many people who turned severe eyes to Regin.

Especially the people, who respected/regarded Brune’s tradition and obstinately tried to protect it, criticized even the fact that Regin was the ruler. Their claim was that the princess should quickly decide someone to become King, get married and become Queen, and give birth to a child.

They were not bad people. Nor were they incompetent. For example, there was one who had a territory and while being thought of as a strict feudal lord by his people, was loved by them; there was one who worked in the royal palace and was quite knowledgeable about customs from the old days and was relied on by his colleagues.

Only the belief/prejudice that traditions should be protected above all things was their problem. It was hard to call it a flaw. After all, the people of the era, when Regin’s father, Faron had ruled, had also thought of this as a virtue.

Be that as it may, they, who assumed such an attitude even towards Regin who was the Princess, naturally gave a bitter/harsh evaluation to Tigre, too.

“Although he’s raise remarkable war results, Earl Vorn isn’t like a Brune noble

at all. To think that he can use neither a sword nor a spear, what kind of education did he receive from his predecessors? Being skilled at archery isn't different from being skilled at cleaning out mud from a ditch; there's nothing to be proud about."

"In the first place, shouldn't we say that those war results aren't his but Zhcted's? And Alsace's soldiers who didn't even number 100, how much activity did they display?"

"It's said that he rescued Her Highness the Princess, but I don't think that his actions afterwards were carried out while considering her safety. Her Highness too must impartially evaluate him without making a mistake in that area."

It seemed that, whenever Regin heard such voices, she was stopped by Badouin and company as she tried to call out to the speaker.

"It will take time to gain their understanding; much more, if it's people like them."

Badouin said so as he bowed his head with an apologetic face. His mustache which grew erectly like a cat's hung down at those times as if reflecting its master's feelings.

Rather than consenting with Badouin's words, Regin withdrew from consideration to the chief vassal whom she trusted. Besides, if she punished them, only the people opposing Regin would be pleased with it. She could not afford to show weakness until her position as a ruler became firm.

During such a time, when Tigre's return was decided/determined and it was conveyed by Mashas, one rumor came to spread in the royal palace.

It was concerning how Princess Regin would treat Earl Vorn.

If Regin were to take Tigre's hand with a smile and hugged him, she could easily imagine what kind of reaction they would show. Also how they would blame not only Regin, but Tigre.

After having hesitated, Regin decided to act as a cold ruler.

"—In the audience room, do you still remember about when I referred to 'Moonlight Knights army'? There were people who began to make a racket

about only that. And, it isn't just one or two persons."

Tigre could only nod. Though it was an intense indignation, it temporarily took the voice away from the youth. Traditions were indeed important. But, it was not like it was Regin who caused these present conditions.

Wasn't it Duke Thenardier and Duke Ganelon who played with schemes and pushed this country into war by causing a civil war? Wasn't it because they drove King Faron to death too early?

Tigre was about to say this to her Highness the Princess, but he shook his head. After inhaling and exhaling, he called out to her.

"Regin....."

He softly put his right hand on her right hand that was hugging him. He considered the seriousness of the situation which she was put in. If he did not do that, she would not be able to express her feelings.

Regin leaked a small voice and changed her posture. She let her body stick more to Tigre's back and put her left hand on Tigre's right hand. She happily whispered to Tigre.

"The truth is, when I called you to the balcony, I intended to talk to you. But when I thought that you might have taken it not as my words, but the words of the Princess, I became scared and was unable to say anything. So, I made up my mind and boldly came here....."

Tigre silently gripped her right hand. He was glad that she thought this much about a man like him.

On the other hand, Tigre was self-aware that the desire/lust, which he should have held down while listening to her story, had raised its head again. The warmth transmitted by the softness of her hand gave energy/vitality to his desire.

Regin's hand was small, the fingers were thin and the nails were neat. It was a beautiful hand.

Just by keeping holding onto this hand, he thought about wanting to entrust himself to his impulse, turning back and push her down.

As he swallowed his saliva, he felt like that sound of swallowing could be heard awfully loudly. Tigre desperately endured the emotion which stimulated him.

He persuaded himself that Regin trusted him. Or, that interpretation was wrong and he might disappoint her. Even so, he came to a clean decision that it could not be helped. About a little less than 50 seconds had passed before he came to this decision.

“—Thank you, Regin.”

Tigre released Regin’s right hand as he said that. Perhaps because his grip had been filled with unnecessary power due to too much tangle, her hand became slightly red. While inwardly apologizing for that, Tigre slowly spun his words.

“There’s little I can do for you. It may not amount to even half of what you’ve done for me. But, I’ll say just this. Just like you’re dearly thinking of me, I also think dearly of you.”

It was not because there were lord and retainer. There were words precisely because he held good will towards the girl called Regin and thought that he wanted to do something for her. As for Tigre, he intended to frankly convey his feelings without hiding or twists.

Immediately after, although it was only an instant, an unnatural silence lay between the two people.

“Tigre. I’m happy about those words of yours. I also understand that they aren’t lies or casual remark, but words from your true feelings. Based on that, I would like to ask you just one thing, but—”

Still leaning on Tigre’s back as is, Regin slowly continued her words.

“Didn’t you also say something like that to someone other than me?”

This time, it was Tigre’s turn to fall into silence. Moreover, whereas Regin’s silence was intended to prepare her words, in the youth’s silence, he could not find words to return.

“I don’t deny it, but.....”

After a little while, Tigre said so as he was troubled. Or he should have lied

while being aware that he was seen through. Saying “I’ve only said it to you”.

But, Tigre did not do so. He thought that he should clearly express his feelings even if it would displease Regin.

Regin chuckled and quietly released her embrace. She separated from Tigre’s back.

“I understand. For now, I will be glad with having been able to become an important person to you.”

As she finished speaking or was still in the middle of speaking, a new sensation was transmitted to the youth’s back. It seemed to be a cloth wet with hot water. Regin said in an unusually bright voice.

“Since I’m already here, I’ll wash your back.”

“No, you don’t need to.....”

Tigre raised a feeble voice and was going to decline, but Regin moved her hands without minding it. As he thought that she would not stop no matter what he said, Tigre decided to let her do as she liked.

---It was reversed at the time of Agnes.

“I had had you wipe my back before, right?”

Regin suddenly said. Since he was exactly thinking about it, Tigre reflexively straightened up his back. Perhaps because his reaction was fun, Regin lightly laughed.

“Do you remember when I called you ‘Tigre’ for the first time?”

“I think it was in Agnes.”

When Tigre answered so while cocking his head in puzzlement, Regin lightly pinched the youth’s shoulder.

“You’re wrong. It was when you treated me to the bird you had just caught. When I said that it was a long name, you told me that calling you Tigre was fine. Did you forget that?”

Tigre kept silent. It was something from eight years ago. Along with the fact that he had been scolded afterwards by his father for having made the other

party eat the bird he roasted without knowing that he/she was a royalty, it remained in his memory. But as expected he did not remember what kind of conversation they exchanged.

“I was happy; that there was someone coming in contact with me like that.”

While saying so nostalgically, Regin washed Tigre’s back with hot water.

Thinking that it seems to be over, while looking at the hot water flowing on the floor, the youth took a small breath. At the same time with a sense of relief, there was a feeling of regret that this situation was over. He rummaged his darkish red hair as he realized that. Anyway, what he had to do now was to wait for Regin to leave.

However, even after about ten seconds had passed, Regin showed no signs of leaving.

“—Tigre.”

A calm voice tinged with seriousness struck the youth’s earlobe. Tigre spontaneously straightened himself and tightened his face with tension. Though he did not see it, but Regin probably did as such, too^[9].

“Would you hear my story only a bit more/longer?”

“Yes” Tigre only answered so.

“—I have never gone to Zhcted and Asvarre.”

The princess’ words, which were spun slightly later after Tigre’s reply, took the youth aback.

“I know neither King Victor’s voice nor Lord Tallard’s and Princess Guinevere’s faces. Even the Sachstein’s troops which are attacking now, I haven’t seen even their shadows.”

“I think that it is something that can’t be helped.....”

The Zhcted King Victor could probably not move from the capital Silesia because of his advanced age, and civil war was just settled in Asvarre last year. Even Brune was still far from stability. So, the ruler could not afford to move freely. Of course, going to the battlefield was out of question.

“As you say, there may be no helping it. However, an inexcusable situation might occur in the near future.”

Regin’s words were dignified without faltering, and above all, they let one feel her strong will. Tigre silently listened to her.

“A little more than one year has passed since I began to rule this country as a Princess. What I experienced everyday was the difficulty of governing and the lack of replacements of those who supporting me as well as their greatness. It is precisely because they left this country (to us) that our present exists.”

Including the late King Faron and Roland with the name of “Black Knight”, there were people who had exerted themselves for Brune. Nameless soldiers who fell on the battlefield, people who minutely plowed in rough grounds, craftsmen and merchants. Several tens, several hundreds of thousands of people built this country.

“As Faron’s child and as a person born in Brune’s royal family which has continued since the founder Charles, I have the duty to protect this country and make it rich. However, it cannot possibly be accomplished with only my power alone. —I need you.”

Feelings mixed with surprise and confusion appeared in Tigre’s eyes. The Princess’ blue pupils, which were filled with a resolute will and emitted calm brightness, jewels without a scratch, could be easily imagined^[10].

“Regin.....”

Tigre’s voice trembled. Just muttering her name was the best he could do.

The youth finally got an answer more than what he expected from Regin.

Behind him, he felt the presence of Regin standing up.

“Thank you for listening to me.”

Her voice when she said so was similar to the one of when she embraced Tigre; it contained a slight sound of wanting to be spoiled.

“I wanted you..... only you to hear my dream. I also said it at the balcony, but please tell me your answer after the war is over.”

Her presence faded away along with small footsteps. After hearing the sound

of the entrance's door opening and then closing, Tigre finally stood up. He walked not to the bathtub in front of him, but to the one, which was filled with cold water, located in a corner. He soaked in it until his waist.

His chest was hot. He himself felt that his face was flushing.

He wanted to be helpful to her no matter how small a thing he could do. He wanted to abandon all hesitations and follow her.

But, there were things that Tigre had to do. There were too many things which he thought were important to abandon them.

Even after the excessive heat left his body, Tigre continued being soaked in the bathtub of cold water for a while. Considerable time was required until his heart and head regained calm.

Chapter 3 - Revolt

The moon rose highly with stars shining coolly as the background.

The night also wore on, there were no longer figures of people in the royal palace's hall and only soldiers standing guard could be seen in the corridor. It was to the point that only a civil official who worked very rarely until late could be seen walking out.

This night, the first unusual event occurred in the pillared corridor on the royal palace's first floor.

One man suddenly appeared before the soldiers standing guard. Although it was a strange thing to say he suddenly appeared, their eyes could only see it as such.

That man who was illuminated by the flames of the torches hung on the wall was small-sized. To the extent that one would think that he was a young boy if seeing only his shadow. The man wore good-quality silk clothes and put on a small hat on his bald head. His eyelids were big and his eyes were so thin as to make one wonder whether or not they were opened.

One of the soldiers, while setting up his short spear, raised a challenging voice. Those became the last words that the soldier emitted.

The next moment, the helmet that the soldier wore got squashed and its interior was reduced to a bloody lump of meat. The small-sized man jumped, caught the soldier's head and crushed it from over the helmet.

The man, not exulting in his victory, attacked the other soldiers one after another.

Six soldiers were standing guard in this pillared corridor, but their heads were crushed with none of them able to understand exactly what was happening, and without even having room to call their comrades. Not even about ten

seconds had passed before the one-sided massacre ended.

“I guess I’ll destroy one other place and then go.”

As he wiped his hand covered with blood and pieces of meat with a soldier’s clothes, the man left the pillared corridor.

The man’s name was Maximilian Bennusa Ganelon.

Although Tigre had long been in bed, he was not able to readily fall asleep. Though there was the fact that it was because he went to bed with his leather armor still on him, it was not only that.

After having left the bathhouse, Tigre returned to his room. And he engaged in idle talk with Gaspar, who showed up with a bottle of wine in one hand, and Rurick.

That was something of one koku ago. Rurick moved to the neighboring room, and Gaspar spread out a blanket on the floor of this room and was sleeping on it.

Gaspar was the guard that Mashas sent over as a precaution, just in case something was to happen to disturb the atmosphere in the royal palace. And Rurick came on his own will after having gotten permission from Elen.

By the way, Titta was not in a nearby room. Being called by Regin who said she wanted to hear about when she (Titta) was in Zhcted, she went to the princess’s room. The chestnut-haired maid was honestly happy that the blond-haired princess remembered her.

Looking up at the ceiling covered with a very dim light, Tigre was absentmindedly thinking about something. While recalling Regin’s talk, he was pondering what to do after this war was over.

He made the resolution to leave Alsace. He would be lying if he were to say that it wasn’t painful, but above all he had no choice but to do it in order to protect the land where he was born and raised.

If Brune itself was wrapped in war, a small land like Alsace would probably turn into ash in an instant. Tigre was made to realize it all too well in the civil

war two years ago. After all, if he wasn't able to get Elen's cooperation, the youth's hometown would have been burnt and destroyed.

If Brune was at peace, Alsace would be able to pursue its peace as well.

Of course, there was the thought of wanting to support Regin and also the feeling of being able to help Mashas, Augre, Gerard and company.

---But, as expected it's quiet far from the capital.....

The question to answer "which place is?" was very clear for the youth. He would probably think about it many times all this night. And, he would probably not reach a conclusion.

While understanding that he would not reach a conclusion, Tigre pondered about it for the Nth time—. ^[11]

Or so it should have been, but he instantly erased it from within his head. The sound of armor rubbing mixed with the sound of multiple footsteps could be heard from outside the room. His instincts and experience as a warrior and also as a hunter appealed to Tigre for danger. There was no way that only mere suspicious people would go out in groups in the dead of night like this. ^[12]

Though there should be a soldier standing guard outside the room, it was also strange to not hear his voice.

As Tigre quickly got up, he stretched his hand under the bed. There was his black bow and a quiver there. There were 30 arrows in the quiver. It was something which he asked Viscount Augre about at the place of the banquet and had it prepare.

When he turned his gaze to Gaspar who was sleeping on the floor, he too was already awake. A long sword pulled out of its sheath was grasped in his hand. This was something he secretly brought with him.

Though their eyes got used to the darkness, just in case, Gaspar drew a candlestick put nearby and lighted it quickly.

The sound of footsteps stopped before Tigre's room.

Immediately after, a hard crushing sound resounded and blades protruded from the door one after another. The lock was destroyed.

The door was vigorously opened and multiple figures of people with swords jumped in the room. At that time, Tigre had already nocked arrows to the black bow and drew the bowstring.

Three arrows flew, cutting the night air. Three of those figures, who vigorously invaded the room, were respectively struck by an arrow to the forehead and loudly fell down.

---Brune soldiers.....?

Tigre knitted his brows. The intruders' outfits that were illuminated by the fire of the candlestick were the same as those of soldiers working in the royal palace. However, Tigre could not afford to brood over it now.

Even if the intruders were surprised at the fact that Tigre was awake, their movements did not stop. Pushing aside the three people who fell down, the men who were behind entered the room. They drew close before Tigre could shoot an arrow and intended to cut him down.

But, Gaspar jumped in there from the side. The sword grasped in his hand glittered dark gray as it reflected the fire of the candlestick.

When Gaspar cut down the enemy who stood at the vanguard, he returned his wrist and greatly mowed down his sword to the side. It was not to cut down the remaining enemies, but to prevent them from coming any closer. As planned, the men stepped back.

"What are you doing? Sneak around him!"

One of the intruders issued instructions while clicking his tongue. Only that man did not wear a soldier's outfit; he wore silk clothes. And he, who wore silk clothes, slashed at Gaspar from the front.

Gaspar barely repelled the strong blow. From both sides of Gaspar who wasn't able to move in the face of a powerful enemy, the men raised their swords and approached Tigre.

Tigre fired two arrows while kicking the bed and jumping. The two enemies who were approaching from the right respectively had their nose and throat pierced and fell down. Tigre also lost his balance and rolled on the floor. The blade of the enemy who sneaked around from the left approached.

“Tigre!”

Gaspar shouted as his face turned pale. But, if he were to turn his back on the enemy in front of him, he would be slain at that moment. He ground his teeth while stopping the slash of the man in silk clothes.

Tigre rolled again on the floor while holding his bow and barely avoided the sword swung down at him. The enemy’s blade grazed the youth’s leather armor.

At that time, when the enemy raised his sword again, a short scream was raised at the doorway. It was the scream of a comrade of the intruders. For a moment, their attention was directed there.

“Good grief. To think that men would creep into his room at night, I feel sorry for Lord Tigrevurmud.”

The one with a sword covered with blood and having cracked such a joke was the bald-headed Knight, Rurick. When he once again swung his sword and cut down one enemy standing stock still, he aimed at the man in silk clothes. To the appearance of an unexpected enemy, the man in silk clothes also turned his gaze there.

Using that opportunity, Gaspar moved. He fiercely charged at the man who was going to swing down his sword at Tigre. The man shrank as he was more overwhelmed by Gaspar’s spirit than the iron blade.

Along with a battle cry, Gaspar raised his sword and swung it down. A muddy voice along with fresh blood leaked from the man’s mouth. He dropped his sword and fell down on his back motionless.

Gaspar stabbed his sword at the man’s chest for caution’s sake^[13]. Though it seemed to be cruel, it was a fight within a very dim light. He could not possibly feel relieved if he did not surely kill him.

“Are you all right, Tigre?”

Then, Gaspar went down on a knee on the floor and held out his hand to Tigre.

“You saved me, Gaspar-niisan.....”

While breathing heavily, Tigre borrowed his hand and got up. At that time, the fight between Rurick and the man in silk clothes was settled. His sword being knocked down and the tip of a blade thrust at him, the man in silk clothes hung down his hands as he gave up.

“But well, it’s quite something.”

While picking up the candlestick on which fortunately the fire didn’t go out yet and confirming that the intruders were certainly dead, Gaspar spoke in an amazed voice. Perhaps because the fierce battle with the Sachstein army was still fresh in his mind, he showed no signs of faltering even after seeing the corpses. Tigre asked with a wondering face.

“What is?”

“I’m talking about your bow skill. Although your eyes got used to the darkness and there was the light from the candlestick, is it that easy to splendidly aim at the forehead of someone, who suddenly entered, like this? And three people all at once at that.”

“I’ll say this for the honor of all archers, but I want you to think it’s a skill that only Lord Tigrevurmud can do.”

Rurick said so in a somewhat proud tone.

“By the way Lord Gaspar, are you familiar with these scoundrels?”

When Rurick asked that, Gaspar cocked his head in puzzlement as he groaned.

“I don’t really remember their names, but there are some young people of nobility of somewhere among them. Lord Gerard would probably recognize them immediately, but.....”

As he spoke up to there, Gaspar’s eyes became sharp. He knew the man in silk clothes whom Rurick thrust his sword at. Not only Gaspar, but also Tigre knew him.

“Baron Celpet, right?”

With a bitter expression, Tigre called out to Celpet, the man in silk clothes. Celpet moved only his neck and glared at Tigre hatefully.

“Were you aware of our plan? No, you probably were. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have prepared comrades and weapons so conveniently and well.”

“If we weren’t prepared even without being aware of it, we wouldn’t have been able to survive on the battlefield.”

Rurick said so in an indifferent voice and Gaspar nodded. In fact, the three of them were not aware at all of their plan.

“Could you tell me? Why did you try to kill me?”

When Tigre asked so with a severe expression, Celpet arrogantly stuck out his chest and sneered.

“Isn’t it obvious? It’s because you bastard tried to sell this country over to Zhcted. In fact, isn’t that one of your Zhcted subordinates there?”

Celpet glared at Rurick. Tigre exchanged glances first with Rurick, then Gaspar. As he tore the clothes of one corpse, made it into a belt-shaped and tied both of Celpet's hands on his back, Gaspar asked.

“Did these soldiers also think that Tigre betrayed Brune?”

“That’s precisely why we took action. In order to protect this country’s justice and peace.”

Celpet’s suntanned youthful face was distorted because of hatred. Gaspar criticized the young baron in a voice repressing his anger.

“Justice, huh. Is banding together and attacking someone asleep in his bed this late at night your so-called justice?”

“Are you trying to say it’s cowardly? Isn’t it something trivial compared to betraying your country?”

“I know several people who called things inconvenient for them trivial and played it off. Such people are called small villains without exception.”

The bald-headed Knight spat out because of too much scorn. Tigre slipped through their side and went outside the room. He remembered that there was a soldier standing guard. If he was injured, they had to treat him.

However, what Tigre saw was an unexpected scene. The soldier who stood

guard had dropped his buttocks onto the floor and was sleeping like a log, leaned against the wall.

---he was just shifted, so he should have been fine, but.....

Tigre thought 'maybe he might have not ended up sleeping, but was made to sleep'.

When Tigre looked back inside the room, he turned his gaze to the swords scattered on the floor. When looking closely, many of the swords that the enemies were holding had traces of blood roughly having been roughly wiped off on them. In the fight just now, no one among Tigre and company got injured.

In the first place, although they had disguised themselves as soldiers, there was no way that a group of ten people would arrive until here without being questioned by other soldiers.

Tigre suddenly shifted his gaze. He stared at Celpet and asked in a sharp tone.

"I wasn't the only one being targeted, right? You have other comrades, right?"

"We don't", Celpet replied so; but his voice sounded hollow as he was daunted by the youth's sharp gaze and tone of voice.

That reaction instead made the youth convinced he hit bull's eyes. If they were going that far with their outrageous act, then it would be necessary to have someone to supplant Regin and allow all their acts.

Tigre did not question Celpet any further. He picked up his quiver containing arrows and called out to the two men.

"Let's hurry to Lord Mashas's room! Gaspar-niisan, please lead the way."

Tigre did not know at all the structure of the royal palace. If it was the audience room and the banquet hall, he might go alone if it was daytime. He did not feel like being able to go to another place without a guide. All the more, in a situation where the royal palace was wrapped in the night's darkness.

If it was Gaspar, naturally he would know the place where Mashas's room was. He intended to head to Mashas's room and then after having joined him,

head to Regin's bedroom.

With the voice of Celpet, who shouted in frustration, behind them, Tigre and company began to run to the corridor.

The room where Melisande was confined in was in the basement of the royal palace.

It was not small, but not wide, either. There was only the bare minimum like a table, a chair and a bed as furniture put in there; and there were not furnishings at all. As for the window, there was only a small hole which was near the ceiling in order to take in the outside light.

From the day when the Halo Festival was held, Melisande spent her days in this room.

Food, clothes, hot water for bathing and the like were carried in without problem. However, she was not allowed to go outside or call people close to her; when there was something she wanted, she would have to request for Prime Minister Badouin's permission.

Considering what she has done, it was too lenient a treatment; but for Melisande, it was nothing other than humiliation. In her daydreams, who knows how many times she strangled Regin and Badouin to death. Probably 100 times would not be enough.

While burning with tremendous hatred inwardly, ostensibly Melisande spent her days quietly. She understood that the opportunity was not yet lost.

And that opportunity finally came.

Melisande just woke up to sounds which could be heard from outside the door.

Though she was 35 years old, she looked about five years younger than her actual age. Even within an unwilling, and inconvenient livelihood, her long golden hair did not lose its gloss; and without her well-ordered features collapsing, her beauty was not spoiled in the least.

What she wore were not night-clothes, but plain hemp clothes. Since those

were given to her by the royal palace, she had no choice but to wear them.

As she got up from the bed, she haughtily glared at the door. If a subordinate of Regin or Badouin were to show up, she intended to shout, ‘what is it at such a time?’ at him. Though she was slightly scared and anxious, her pride painted over these feelings.

Following the unpleasant sounds of armor rubbing was a dull sound of something heavy being flung against the floor. And then before long, the locked door was slowly opened from outside.

“—Melisande-sama”

At the doorway stood a big man wearing silk clothes and holding a large sword covered with blood. His voice mixed with great joy and tension called out to Melisande. It was a familiar voice for her. This time, Melisande was finally convinced that she was going to be rescued.

“Armand, huh.”

“Yes. I am sorry to have kept you waiting.”

The big man put his sword on the floor, went down on a knee and bowed his head as he desperately contracted his big frame. Then, three soldiers could be seen standing behind him. Among them, two were holding torches.

As Melisande left the bed, she walked until before Armand and haughtily declared.

“I forgive you.”

As far as she was concerned, this was quite a tolerant correspondence^[14]. After all, she directly addressed him without blaming him or giving him punishment. If the other party was not Armand, she would have reprimanded him as a matter of course.

Going through the side of Armand who stood up, Melisande went out to the corridor. The smell of blood assailed her nose and she frowned.

When looking, the abdomen of the soldier who was standing guard was dyed with blood and he was lying down on the floor. He was already dead. As she glanced at the corpse with eyes as if looking at a pebble on the roadside, she

moved her gaze to Armand.

“How is the situation?”

Armand nodded as he shrugged his thick neck and briefly explained.

That they were a group of a little more than 60 people. That 50 people headed towards Regin’s bedroom in order to capture her and 10 people went for Tigrevurmud Vorn’s assassination. And that Armand himself accompanied by the remaining three people came for Melisande’s rescue.

Melisande who finished hearing the details pursed her lips in displeasure.

“There’s no way that only 50 people would be able to capture that fake, right?”

By ‘fake’, she meant Regin. Armand eagerly answered without being daunted by his master’s irritation.

“Though few, the majority of the 50 people are former knights who wielded a sword under Lord Steid. The soldiers working in the royal palace will not be a match for them.”

Steid was the knight who was Duke Thenardier’s close aide. He was a man in whom Thenardier had a deep trust in for both military arts and generalship on the battlefield, but he lost his life in the civil war two years ago.

“In addition, we poisoned the soldiers’ meals. Though, it was not a lethal poison, but the kind that causes headaches and stomachaches and puts one to sleep.”

Regarding the dishes provided in the banquet, the people supporting Regin strictly monitored it. It was a thorough enforcement where not to mention the kitchen, they posted soldiers even in the corridor connecting the kitchen and the banquet hall and any people trying to enter the kitchen, even if they were noble feudal lords, were driven away.

Thus, they^[15] were unable to bribe cooks or the people who carried the completed dishes until the banquet hall.

Therefore, they aimed for the soldiers’ meals. The soldiers’ meals were cooked in another kitchen. Naturally there were no poison tasters, too. And in

this case, the fact that they were few worked in their advantage and they were able to made instructions spread out beforehand.

“We will now head to Regin’s bedroom. No matter what happens, I will protect you, Melisande-sama.”

As Armand said so, he took a torch from one of his comrades and began to walk down the corridor at the vanguard. Melisande followed behind him with calm steps. The three soldiers followed after.

In a place where the smell of blood faded, Melisande tasted the feeling of freedom as she breathed in the cold night air to fill her chest and then grandly breathed it out. At last, she revealed a smile full of confidence.



With Gaspar standing at the vanguard, Tigre and company ran in a corridor of the royal palace wrapped in a very dim light.

On the way, they saw several soldiers who were sleeping like logs lying down on the floor like the soldier who was standing guard for Tigre’s room. Though there were also soldiers not sleeping, they didn't seem to know how to act when they saw some of their colleagues falling asleep and the others unable to move as they had a stomachache.

As for Tigre, while feeling apologetic to them, he had no other choice other than shouting like this.

“Her Highness the Princess is in danger! Hurry to her Highness’ bedroom.”

Tigre judged that their greatest priority was definitely Regin. Shouting so as to invite some confusion should have been effective in appealing to them.

“This man is Tigrevurmud Vorn! He is the hero who defeated the Sachstein army! Believe his words!”

Gaspar also shouted so in a loud voice. Though the soldiers’ reaction was slow, even so some of them followed Tigre and company. There were also those who went to call their comrades.

“Lord Gaspar. How many knights and soldiers are there in this royal palace?”

Rurick asked while being out of breath. Gaspar's breathing, who answered, was also rough.

“It should exceed 10,000, but the royal palace is vast, so.....”

With some important places as an exception, soldiers were posted sparsely and widely within the royal palace. Were something to happen, they would be contacted by a bell, chime or a shout and gathered.

If one was to cause confusion by poisoning the soldiers and divided them, it is possible to penetrate through the gap even if small. Moreover, the enemy knew very well the royal palace's structure and acted under the cover of the night's darkness.

When the passage divided into two, Tigre had the soldiers following them go the other pathway. He had to increase their comrades and have many people know about this abnormal situation.

They came out of the pillared corridor, turned at the corner, ran up or down the stairs.

“We've almost reached the room where Father is.”

When they came out to a wide corridor, the three people stopped all at once.

At the center of the corridor, the figure of a small-sized person stood there alone. The three people halted because an out of the common blood lust was released by that figure. A torch was hung on the wall and its fire was calmly burning, but its light did not reach that figure.

“Who is there?”

Gaspar set up his sword and sharply asked. Tigre stepped forward while nocking an arrow. The youth did not take his eyes off the figure. No, he could not take them off.

---This guy is.....

Sweet oozed on Tigre's forehead. Tigre felt an atmosphere similar to the one, which the inhuman beings — demons such as Vodyanoy, Torbalan and Baba Yaga that he encountered and fought before were clad in, from that figure.

The light of the torch illuminated the figure who took about two steps forward.

It was a man. He wore silk clothes and put on a small hat on his bald head. His thin eyes under big eyelids were tinged with an indescribable eeriness and were staring at Tigre. Behind him, soldiers who were probably the guards of this corridor were lying down on the floor.

“Hi.”

The man raised his right hand and smiled at Tigre and company. Tigre, not answering, drew his bowstring and aimed at the man.

“Who are you?”

It was quite similar to Gaspar’s question a while ago. But, the premise was totally different.

Although Gaspar asked thinking that the man was human, Tigre did not think so.

“That reminds me, this is the first time we're meeting each other from the front like this, huh.”

The man happily shook his shoulders, laughed and named himself.

“I’m Ganelon, Maximilian Bennusa Ganelon. I know who you are, so there’s no need for you to name yourself. Tigrevurmud Vorn.”

“Ganelon.....?”

As he muttered that name, about the time of two breaths was necessary for Tigre to remember the other party. Ganelon. The great noble who competed against Duke Thenardier in the civil war two years ago.

“Impossible.”

The one who shouted so was not Tigre, but Gaspar.

“Ganelon should have died two years ago! He lost to Thenardier and set fire on his own town.”

Ganelon just revealed a faint smile and did not answer. For him, both Gaspar and Rurick were existences not worth considering. Ganelon turned his very thin

eyes to Tigre.

“Today, I came to have you show me your power.”

Tigre’s face was tightened in strain. He strongly pulled the bowstring further and the distance between Tigre and Ganelon did not reach 10 Alsins (about 10 meter). It should have definitely been a sure kill arrow.

A surprising scene appeared before the three people’s eyes. Ganelon caught the arrow shot by Tigre. By pinching the sickle with his fingers.

“Vorn. I didn’t come to see such child’s play.”

Ganelon revealed a cold-blooded smile on his lips and slightly moved the fingers pinching the sickle.

The arrow separated from Ganelon’s fingers and fell to the floor. The sickle was lost. Ganelon crushed it with his fingers. An iron sickle.

Tigre gave a small groan and newly nocked two arrows. He quickly shot them.

However, as expected the arrows did not reach Ganelon. When one thought that Ganelon had lightly waved his hand in front of his face, the next moment the two arrows were grasped in his hand. Tigre had also once grasped with his bare hand an arrow that came flying, but this was clearly in a totally different dimension from that.

“I guess I must somewhat have you go through a painful experience.”

Ganelon broke the arrows and threw them away. He kicked the floor.

Tigre stared wide-eyed. Before he knew it, there was Ganelon’s face before his eyes.

Ganelon raised up his hand. Tigre frantically threw himself onto the floor; something passed by next to his left ear.

The breathing of Tigre who rolled on the floor was awfully disturbed. Although he promptly raised his body, sweat didn’t stop gushing out from his face, streaming down his chin and making many black stains on the floor. His left ear ringed with heat and pain.

“You dodged it well.”

Ganelon who got down before Tigre threw words of praise. Two men slashed at him from behind. They were Gaspar and Rurick. Though the two men weren't able to move even a finger as they were overwhelmed by Ganelon, they mustered up their courage and drove in a slash.

Ganelon did not even look back towards them. He just raised his right and left hands behind as if doing "banzai".

A high-pitched crushing sound resounded and the sword blades which turned into countless iron scraps danced in the air. The two men's swords were each blown into pieces from under the sword guard. The shock was so tremendous that the two swordsmen staggered as if being struck by something and fell down on their backs.

"Won't you reveal your power?"

The youth silently glared at Ganelon who made a puzzled face. He was unable to answer.

The current Tigre could use the black power on his own will. But, he needed some time in order to shoot an arrow wrapped with the "power".

There was no way he could talk about such a weakness of his. Besides, even if he talked about it, he did not possibly think that this man, who was in front of him, would give him enough time.

"In that case, it means that you're of no use. It's boring, but I guess I'll kill you."

Ganelon raised his right hand. Tigre set up the black bow and nocked an arrow. But, it was just the admirable intimidation of a pitiful small animal towards a ferocious wild animal.

The next moment, feeling a sense of discomfort at the back of his ear, the youth stopped. Ganelon also ran his gaze to the surroundings with the posture of his right hand raised as is. They felt with their skin that a foreign substance had stepped into this space where they were.

"—Void Corridor (Vol Dole)"

The calm voice accompanied with the distortion could be heard overhead the

two of them. Faster than that could voice disappear, Ganelon kicked the floor and leapt back. A high-pitched sound similar to the clashing of a metal and rock echoed in the corridor. And a pure white cloth gently swooped down in front of Tigre.

“It’s been a long time. Duke Ganelon.”

It was a beautiful clear voice as if rolling a bell.

Being illuminated by the torch’s flame, her bluish-black long hair and white dress emerged in the darkness. A scythe with an ominous molding colored in red and black emitted a dull radiance.

The “Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow” Valentina Glinka Estes stood there as though to protect Tigre from Ganelon.

“Good grief, we meet in a strange place, eh.”

Seeing Valentina, Ganelon revealed a light smile.

“Why do you protect that boy? He won’t be a necessary piece for you, will he?”

“I was ordered by His Majesty King Victor to cooperate with Earl Vorn. So as a Vanadis, I have no choice but to obey a royal order.”

Valentina replied without erasing her smile, which made Ganelon smile wryly. He knew well that the black-haired Vanadis did not care at all about the order from the king. But, it seemed to be a fact that she intended to protect Tigrevurmud Vorn.

“I understand. Then, I’ll play with you for a little while.”

As soon as he finished saying that, light was born in both of Ganelon’s hands. The light swelled up in an instant and changed into fireballs as big as a human’s head, tinged with crimson flames.

Tigre who was watching their conversation behind Valentina held his breath. When he fought the demon called Baba Yaga in Lebus, the youth witnessed the same scene as now. That demon (Baba Yaga) too made a mass of flame appear in an empty space.

---As expected, this man too.....

When Ganelon stuck out both his hands in front, the fireballs were released; they described an arc in the air and swoop down on Tigre and company. Tigre unintentionally faltered, but Valentina stared at the fireballs with a cool expression. Without even trying to dodge them, she raised the scythe, Hollow Shadow which she held in her right hand.

“— ^{Tinker}Black Haze”

Valentina made the Hollow Shadow flash. For an action which aimed at the fireballs approaching, it was too fast a swing. The curved huge blade made the atmosphere howl, and passed through the empty space.

However, it was not like the black-haired Vanadis had failed. Along the orbit of the scythe that she swung, a black fog-like thing gushed forth in the air. It spread in a blink of an eye and blocked the two fireballs.

The moment when they crashed into the black fog, the fireballs vanished while emitting a sound like when fire disappeared when sprinkled with water.

“Hou.”

Ganelon raised a voice of admiration. With a sweet smile, Valentina received the dark glare of the small-sized former duke.

Ganelon stepped forward. At that moment, the smile disappeared from Valentina’s face; and the black-haired Vanadis set up her scythe with both hands and vigorously swung it out.

A dreadful clashing sound harking back to a thunderbolt roared in the corridor. The right hand of Ganelon who attacked from overhead of Valentina was blocked by the Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow’s Dragonic Tool. Ganelon, not taking pursuit, kicked the scythe, danced in the air and landed on the floor.

While breathing on his right hand unnaturally, Ganelon took a sidelong glance at Valentina.

“As expected, I have bad affinity with you. A very bad one.”

“If your body was a little bigger and your arms a little longer, it’d have been dangerous.”

Valentina recovered her smile and replied so. She was going to speak further, but she held her tongue after noticing the change on the scythe in her hand.

The Hollow Shadow, which should be her Dragonic Tool, independent of her will, wore a black brightness on its curved blade. Then, that brightness drew a gentle spiral and streamed behind Valentina through her side.

There was Tigrevurmud Vorn there. He stood up, stepped firmly to the floor with both his feet, set up the black bow and has nocked an arrow. The bowstring has already been drawn to the maximum.

The youth was not just silently watching the fierce fight between Ganelon and Valentina. He had fixed his breathing while being captivated by the crimson fireballs and the Vanadis' Dragonic Skill, braced up his body and called out to the black bow.

And then, the black bow answered its master's appeal. Valentina's Dragonic Tool similarly consented to help Tigre. Black brightness flowed into the tip of the arrow nocked by the youth, and an extremely strong power to the extent that even Valentina and Ganelon opened their eyes wide, was born.

"It's that. What I wanted to see."

Ganelon's voice trembled with delight.

"Although your father might have been good, he was an ordinary man. Even your mother was also an ordinary woman. Since a person like you was born from those two, it's really interesting."

Spinning words as he was somewhat excited while laughing loudly, the former duke with an atmosphere looking more like that of a demon stuck out both his hands in front. As if trying to block with his hands the arrow which would be shot.

"Come, Vorn!"

Tigre did not answer. The power of the Dragonic Tool was still pouring into the sickle. He intended to concentrate the black brightness until just before the arrow became unable to bear it. Burden was put on the youth's body accordingly, but he could not compromise here.

---I'll bring him down with this attack.....!

If he did not shot with that intention, it would probably not work on Ganelon.

One. Two. Three. And when the time passed through the count of 4, Ganelon slightly moved his right foot. Along with a cry of fighting spirit, the arrow left Tigre's right hand. These two actions occurred exactly at the same time.

Ganelon opened his eyes wide. The arrow shot by Tigre disappeared without sound.

Even if the small-sized former duke felt confusion, it was just an instant. But faster than he could recovered from confusion, the arrow, which should have disappeared, appeared immediately near him.

At one point of the space on Ganelon's left, darkness was born. The darkness spread in a perfect circle and an arrow was shot out from inside it. Of course, the sickle wore black brightness.

Tigre's and Valentina's field of vision was filled with black brightness. Then, an earsplitting roaring sound similar to that of a sandstorm was mercilessly struck in their hearing. Although the black brightness disappeared almost instantly, a cloud of dust densely whirled up this time.

When that cloud of dust too cleared away and their field of vision finally opened up, what the two people saw were a horrible ceiling as if having been gouged by a dragon's claws, stone pavements turned up, the floor where countless rubble rolled, and a huge hole opened on the wall of the left side. A cloud of dust fell clatteringly from the ceiling.

".....Oh my."

Valentina put her hand on her lips and finally said only that. As for Tigre, just standing was painful and just fixing his breathing was the best he could do.

When the black-haired Vanadis looked back towards Tigre, she inclined her head to the side and frankly asked.

"Was having the arrow bound/jump on the left side your aim?"

Although Tigre frowned to the sudden question, he gave a small nod while breathing heavily. He turned his black eyes to the large hole in the wall. Ahead

of the hole was a garden blown off by the power of the black bow, and further ahead the night's darkness lurked in deep (pitch) blackness.

Having made the arrow teleport was of course to take Ganelon by surprise. On top of that, Tigre considered it so that serious damage would not be given to the royal palace.

A smile appeared on Valentina's lips. She seemed on one hand to be amused at the youth's judgment, and on the other hand, admire it.

At that time, a groan was heard behind Tigre. Gaspar and Rurick woke up. While raising her scythe, Valentina said to Tigre.

"Earl Vorn. I'll chase him, so I leave the rest to you."

While Tigre was thinking about the meaning of her words, the black-haired Vanadis used a Dragonic Skill.

"Space Corridor."

Like a ripple spread on the surface of water, the space around Valentina was distorted. The black-haired Vanadis' figure became blurred as it melted into the distortion, and lost its colors and outline. Tigre had no leisure to stop her, either.

Just like when she suddenly appeared, the Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow suddenly disappeared.

Though Tigre stood stock still as he was dumbfounded, he came to his senses as he heard Mashas' voice. When he looked ahead in the corridor, there was the figure of the old earl with a sword in his right hand and a lighted torch in his left hand. He had probably heard the roaring sound caused by the black bow's attack.

Though Tigre was concerned about Ganelon and Valentina, there was a more important thing to do now. He briefly explained that they were attacked by Celpet and others. Mashas' expression became serious.

"I understand. Let's hurry to her Highness's bedroom now."

Gaspar and Rurick borrowed swords from the dead soldiers. The two men shortly prayed to the gods.

With Mashas standing at the vanguard this time, the four men hurried to Regin's bedroom.



When the uproar occurred, Regin was in her bedroom. She was sleeping along with Titta in her luxurious bed with a canopy. This was the best method of listening to Titta's story without being disturbed by people protecting her.

"—Your Highness. I am sorry to interrupt your sleep."

Having brought back the Princess from the sleeping world was the voice of a tensed Auguste. He seemed to have called her over the canopy several times. When Regin replied, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"I am sorry. Please, change into easy to move clothes immediately."

Regin knitted her brows. Was there ever a time when she heard his voice tinged with so much tension? But, she understood well that she should not asked questions at such time.

"Where is Serena?"

She asked about the woman knight acting as her guard. The canopy was turned over as if substituting for a reply and Serena, who held something like clothes under her arm, appeared. She already wore her silver breastplate with a sword at her side.

"Please, put on this quickly."

As she shortly said that, she pushed the clothes to Regin. There were not only clothes for her, but also maid clothes for Titta to wear.

Regin woke up Titta who was sleeping next to her and handed the clothes to the girl with still half-asleep eyes. She took off her night-clothes on the bed and quickly changed herself. The consciousness of Titta became immediately clear as she was also changing her clothes. Meanwhile, Serena explained.

"It is a revolt."

She briefly asserted. She said that dozens of soldiers were heading here while killing the soldiers standing guard one after another.

“Just to be on the safe side, please leave from here before it is too late.”

Regin was shocked. Because of too much shock, words did not come out at once. She greatly opened her eyes wide, half-opened her mouth and looked at Serena with a face which seemed like she would cry at any moment.

She had carefully listened to the words of people who held dissatisfaction and harbored animosity towards her. She had refrained from giving severe treatments and extreme instructions, and planned to settle it with time. She believed that it was for Brune.

But now, they were trying to eliminate her by sword. Was her way of doing things wrong? Or, was her existence itself not accepted?

“—Regin-sama.”

Having called out to her with a voice containing determination was Titta who changed into maid clothes. Shutting up the uneasiness inside her hazel-colored pupils, she, the chestnut-haired girl revealed a smile to the best of her ability.

“Surely..... Tigre-sama will surely come. So, let’s escape for now.”

Regin came to her senses at Titta’s voice and Tigre’s name. That’s right. I’ll think and worry about it later. We must escape for now.

As she eagerly mustered her feelings that almost lost strength, Regin went out of the bed.

Auguste clad in a dark gray armor stood at the doorway and inquired about the situation of the corridor with a stern face. His splendid beard which grew from his cheeks to his chin slightly shook due to tension.

“Auguste. How is the situation in the corridor?”

“It will hold out for now.”

Judging from Auguste’s words and expression, the enemy has probably come quite close. Regin looked back towards Serena.

“Serena. Please lend me a hand. We will move this.”

What Regin indicated with her gaze was the bed where she and Titta were sleeping until a while ago.

“There is a path under this.”

Serena understood with these words. The three people Regin, Serena and Titta moved the heavy bed. Then when Regin touched the floor and strongly pressed a certain place, a square hole opened in a part of the floor while emitting a creaking sound. The hole stretched straight below and several iron handles were attached on the wall surface.

At that time another guard Claude, entered the bedroom. Similarly to Serena, he also wore a silver breastplate and a sword to his waist. He seemed to have grasped the situation while looking around the faces of Regin and company and then looking at the hole.

“I will stand at the vanguard. After me will be her Highness and I will have Serena protect the rear.”

“We will also take Titta along. Stay behind me.”

Serena revealed a perplexed face as Regin said so. This was because the reason she gave maid's clothes to Titta was because she intended to have her (Titta) pretend to be a maid working in the royal palace and have her escape into the maids' room.

Serena exchanged looks with Claude, and then looked at Titta. The chestnut-haired girl strongly nodded.

“If you do not mind it, I-I will go together with you.”

There was no time to persuade her. Claude began to go down the hole as quickly as possible.

“Understood. We will also protect you as much as possible.”

Serena said so after reconsidering it. She knew neither the enemy's numbers nor their character. For Titta, it might not be necessarily safe to have her go to the maids' room.

At that time, Auguste walked to their direction.

“Titta. I leave her Highness the Princess to you.”

With a smile, Auguste put a hand on Titta's shoulder. As this time, he was not a knight of the Calvados Knight Squadron, but has returned to the young man who took care of children in the land of Alsace. Titta looked up at Auguste and strongly nodded.

"Let's meet again later, Auguste-san. Without fail."

Regin also looked up at Auguste and said.

"Auguste. Fight in order to survive."

This knight would by no means listen to her even if she asked him to surrender or run away. Though she was to the bitter end in the relation of master/servant with Auguste and they did not have so close an interchange, she understood at least this much. That this man was such a man.

"As you will" Auguste shortly answered. This was this man's good faith/sincerity.

The sound of weapons was subtly heard. Fighting spirit flickered in both of Auguste's eyes and it pressed Regin and company to act. When Regin crouched down on the edge of the hold, she placed her feet on the handles of the wall surface and went down carefully.

After Regin and company entered the secret passage, Auguste moved the bed with a canopy and covered the hole. He might earn some time with this.

---If only it was perfect, it would've proceeded without problem.

Auguste tightly grasped his fist and strongly gritted his back teeth.

The knights of the Calvados Knight Squadron serving as the Princess' guards numbered 29 including Auguste. But among them, more than half were not available due to headaches or stomachaches^[16]. Far from holding a sword, it was doubtful whether they could even stand on their feet.

The enemy had numerical superiority and among them, there were more than ten people with ability equal to Auguste's side.

"Those guys aren't ordinary soldiers. They are knights who received training."

He remembered his subordinates' words. In short, the enemy had used the same move as them. Like when they were asked by Badouin and came into the royal palace, the enemy had also dragged knights into the royal palace.

When he received a soldier's report that a great number of men with swords had appeared, Auguste gave up the plan of meeting the enemy in Regin's bedroom which he used until now. He considered the situation that that couldn't protect the princess.

He posted subordinates who could still move in the long and narrow corridor outside the bedroom. He tried to prevent the enemy from making use of their strong point which was their great numbers. But, by just assaulting them in the princess' bedroom, the enemy would by no means become weak.

His subordinates were gradually forced to retreat, and fell one after another until Auguste remained alone.

When he shot a crossbow and killed one of the enemies, Auguste threw away the crossbow.

He set up his sword and shield.

"Come at me, small fries. I, Auguste of the Calvados Knight Squadron, will cut you down."

The enemy raised their swords and jumped at him. Auguste cut down the first one and blocked the second person's sword with his shield. He dodged the sword of a man approaching climbing over the first person's corpse. The blade, which was already covered with blood, grazed Auguste's armor.

He swung his sword and pierced the enemy's abdomen. But, it was a failure. The man whose abdomen was pierced fell while holding Auguste's sword. The sword came out of Auguste's hand.

He bashed one of the approaching enemies with his shield. Immediately after that, the enemy slashed at Auguste with the momentum of bumping into him with their body. A dull pain ran through Auguste's abdomen. He hardened his clenched fist and hit the man. There, a new enemy raised his sword and attacked him.

The pain on his abdomen made Auguste's action dull. Though he avoided a

direct hit, the man's sword struck Auguste's armor. Auguste broke his balance. Deep red blood spilled from his injured abdomen.

His body was heavy. His breathing was disturbed. The men charged at Auguste while raising shrieks.

Auguste bent his body with all his strength and cried as loud as possible. He struck sideways his shield on the enemy who drew the closest. That enemy was flung against the wall as he was sent flying and collapsed trailing. His face covered with blood deformed.

The men faltered and stopped their advance. As Auguste revealed a ferocious smile, he picked up the sword that a man had dropped. Even that movement alone was something extremely painful for this man now. His view shook and his breathing was disturbed.

---I have let all my subordinates die.

Auguste apologized to his subordinates who died. They should have been able to play a more active role in a battlefield more suitable for them. He inwardly muttered "I'm sorry for being a worthless superior/boss".

He similarly apologized to his friends, colleagues and superiors who were at the Calvados Fort. But, he reported that he behaved like a knight until the end and did not stain the Knight Squadron's honor.

---I wonder whether Titta was able to safely escape. Tigre-sama is.....

Within his hazy consciousness, the two people's faces floated in Auguste's mind. However, it disappeared at once and the figure of one man appeared.

---Urz-sama.....

For Auguste, speaking of Alsace's feudal lord, it was Urz after all.

It wasn't like Tigre wasn't suitable. Only four years have passed since Tigre became Alsace's feudal lord succeeding his father. For Auguste, Tigre would truly become Alsace's feudal lord after another ten years.

It was Urz who had written a letter of recommendation so that Auguste became a knight and it was also Urz who was happy that he (Auguste) was able to become one.

---I am sorry, Urz-sama.

While wielding a sword and bashing with the shield, Auguste apologized.

---As a knight, as a person from Alsace, I intended to serve Tigre-sama for a long time, but it seems like.....

Auguste was not able to say more than that. Blood loss robbed him of his consciousness.

To Auguste who stopped moving, swords were stabbed one after another.

Auguste fell down, still tightly grasping the sword and shield.

The men did not immediately approach Auguste. They were afraid that he might immediately get up and swing the sword around.

When they were finally convinced that he'd died after more than 20 seconds had passed, the men stepped over the fallen Auguste and achieved their invasion into the princess' bedroom.

In a place quite far away from Regin's bedroom, Melisande received a report. It said that although they defeated the enemy, Regin's figure was no longer there.

"Our comrades have already gone ahead to the path leading to the back corridor. However, they said that she did not escape to there. I don't want to imagine it, but I can only think that she ran from the window."

To the subordinate who reported hesitantly, Melisande revealed a scornful smile.

"Let's head to the audience room."

To her words, the men looked at each other with wonder. Melisande said.

"There is a hidden passage leading from the bedroom to the audience room. Regin had definitely used it."

It was something that Melisande was taught by her father before as a secret handed down only to royalty. She had not told this even to her husband Thenardier.

Melisande's father probably told her for her sake. After all, depending on a change of the situation, there was also a future where Melisande might become the Princess. He must have not even thought that she would use it in order to corner the ruler.

Leaving behind a little less than 30 comrades' bodies and the enemies' corpses which were less than half of that, Melisande and company headed to the audience room.

Regin and company were advancing through the long and narrow passage with little light and touching^[17].

Only Claude standing at the vanguard held a light. He was holding a sword in his right hand and a torch in his left hand.

Suddenly, Claude stopped and looked back to Regin.

"Your Highness. The path is divided into two....."

Regin looked over his shoulder ahead of the passage. The passage was certainly split or into left and right.

---If I remember correctly, we could go outside of the audience room if we go left and outside the royal palace if we go right.....

It was one of the secrets taught only to the royalty that her father Faron told her. Now, they should leave the royal palace as soon as possible.

"To the right....."

When Regin said up to there, Titta, who was behind her, called out to her with a trembling voice.

"U-Um, Regin-sama..... I think that you should avoid going to the right."

Regin looked back towards Titta with a dubious face. The chestnut-haired maid's face turned white due to tension and fear. While looking at the passage to the right with eyes as if seeing something frightening, Titta said.

"I get the feeling that something really scary is waiting ahead of this side....."

Regin hesitated just for an instant, and then lightly tapped Titta's shoulder as

to let her feel relieved.

“I understand. Let’s go to the left.”

It is said that Titta has acquired the ascetic practices as a shrine maiden. She might have felt some kind of danger. And above all, there was no guarantee that it was absolutely safe to go to the right.

Regin and company went ahead through the left passage. There was another secret passage in the audience room. If they moved from a secret passage to another secret passage, they would probably drift away from the enemy.

It was something that Regin and company had no way of knowing, but Titta’s intuition proved right. At the exit of the passage to the right, Ganelon who disappeared before Tigre was waiting there. If they were to move that way, Regin and company would probably not have escaped from death.

After having turned several times to the left passage, they hit its end. Handles instead of a ladder were buried in the wall and they extended to the top. Claude handed the torch to Regin and climbed up. Regin and company followed him, too.

They finished climbing the ladder of handles. When they looked around while raising the torch, the throne was immediately nearby. There was also the fake Durandal.

“We seem to have properly come out in the audience room.”

Regin heaved a sigh of relief. It was the first time that she’d used the secret passage, so she was anxious. Following her, Titta and Serena also came out of the passage.

Behind the throne, there was a long and narrow corridor leading to the balcony. Though she thought about hiding there, Regin shook her head and turned her gaze to the wall of the left side viewing from the throne. There was a hidden passage leading to outside of the royal palace there.

“We do not have time to rest. Let’s hurry.”

It was at that time when Regin was about to begin to walk to the left wall.

The door leading to the corridor was vigorously opened, and men armed with

swords and armor rushed in. Raising voices of surprise, Regin and Titta stood petrified. Claude and Serena quickly stood before them and set up their swords.

The intruders raised the torches and candlesticks which they had in their hands. The figures of Regin and company were illuminated.

“She’s there; it’s the Princess.”

Someone shouted and the intruders made a stir. There was not even an ounce of respect for the Princess in their voices. A shadow of despair floated across Claude and Serena’s faces. Though it was hard to understand in the darkness, the enemy numbered about 20. It was not a number that only the two of them could do something about.

“Regin-sama, I am sorry.....”

Titta said with an expression like she would burst into tears at any moment.

“It’s because I said that we should take this way that.....”

“You’re wrong, Titta. It’s me who decided to advance to this way.”

Regin turned gentle blue pupils to Titta and stroked her head to comfort her. The existence of someone whom she should protect made Regin recover herself, encouraged her and made her hold the determination to fight.

Regin and company were in a place one level higher than the soldiers. The blond-haired Princess coolly looked down at the intruders who stuck out their swords in the front and slowly shortened the distance and sharply roared.

“Know your place.”

The intruders stopped their movements as they were surprised. Regin continued.

“If you are also people who were born and raised in Brune, do you not feel ashamed to trample down the royal palace?”

Her voice was by no means loud, but it resounded in the audience room with reliable dignity and made the soldiers stagger. Although cornered, Regin showed no signs of being daunted at all. Judging that it was a good opportunity after seeing the soldiers faltering, Serena whispered to Regin.

“Your Highness. We will gain time. Please, go back to the passage and escape.”

“I will say this just in case, but you should not think about escaping by going back to the passage.”

But, Serena’s words were dispelled by a triumphant, loud laughter. Multiple figures of people entered the audience room from the corridor. The number of lights illuminating the large hall increased, and the figure of one woman was picked up. It was Melisande. Next to her, there was also a big man carrying a large sword on his shoulder, Armand.

“It’s been a long time. I wanted to see you, Regin.”

In a voice kneaded with a sense of superiority, Melisande smiled at Regin.

“Do you know why I am here? When I received the report that your figure was nowhere to be found, this place immediately came to mind. I thought that you, who are far from the words ‘fair and square’, would definitely run away shamelessly by using a hidden passage.”

Regin did not return any words. She couldn’t hide her surprise at the fact that Melisande knew about the existence of this passage. And, she also thought that her way of retreat was completely cut off.

Since she had anticipated this, it would be a fact that Melisande knew about the structure of the secret passage. Even if Regin went back to her bedroom, Melisande’s subordinates would be definitely waiting for her there.

But, she did not think that Melisande put this royal palace completely under her control.

---I must not give up.

There were Badouin, Mashas, Augre and Tigre. They would surely act in order to save her. Believing that, she gained time even if a little.

With sadistic feelings flickering in her blue pupils, Melisande said.

“I won’t kill you immediately. I will torture and thoroughly humiliate you to the extent that you will regret having been born in this world.”

“Isn’t it rather because I have value as a hostage that you won’t kill me

immediately?”

Regin resolutely retorted. What was important was to not let them hurt Serena, Claude and Titta. In addition, Melisande must not realize that she was buying time.

“That’s right. It’s just as you say. I must take you as a hostage.”

Melisande put on a serious expression and easily admitted to Regin’s indication. However, she immediately revealed a cruel smile.

“But, it’s fine if the hostage is alive. I wonder if I should cut one of your arms or feet and show it to them. Scooping out your eyeballs wouldn’t be bad, too. That’s right; I might also demand Badouin’s head. Whenever they refuse it, I will cut your body little by little and give each part to them. I’m looking forward to which time Badouin’s head would be sent.”

“I wonder about that. Badouin is a firm person after all. He might think that dying would be better than the Princess of a country being thoughtlessly disgraced.”

While enduring the fear and chill running down her spine, Regin obstinately warded it off. Though Melisande turned an annoyed gaze, she sank into silence. Her reaction made Regin hold a conviction.

As expected, they did not reach the point of controlling the royal palace.

“Melisande. I would like to ask you something.”

While being careful not to break her dignified stance, Regin carefully spun her words. There was only one thing she was concerned about.

“After having killed me and becoming Brune’s ruler, what do you intend to do?”

Melisande frowned. There was also the fact that Regin’s stout-hearted attitude irritated her, but Melisande did not understand the meaning of that question. Regin further said.

“I’m asking about how you will govern Brune.”

“Ah, you mean that? Isn’t it obvious? I will restore things which should return to their original state and change everything to the right direction.”

Seeming to want to say that it was natural, Melisande scornfully laughed.

“I will break the alliance with Zhcted and take back Agnes. I will purge all the fools who toady to you and infest the royal palace, and take away the territories from the feudal lords who followed you and Ganelon. I will appoint the people with a right heart who truly pledge allegiance to the royal family and give them new territories.”

Regin held her breath. What Melisande was trying to do was only the folly of making enemies inside and outside the country. If she made an enemy out of Zhcted, the ones who would be happy would be the neighboring countries such as Muozinel. The noble feudal lords, whose territories would be taken, would probably raise a revolt. And Brune would definitely be destroyed.

But as if to say that her thoughts were not wrong, Melisande loudly said.

“Brune will regain its power. A fake like you would never be able to do that.”

“Do you think that such a thing will really go well.....?!”

Regin’s voice was filled with anger. Melisande responded with a sneer.

“Please, don’t lump me together with a fake like you. I have been raised as a woman who inherited the royal family’s blood. Oh, speaking of fake.....”

Melisande’s gaze was turned to Durandal leaned beside the throne.

When she called Armand’s name, the viscount with a big body began to walk with a ferocious smile. Regin’s face turned pale, but she had no way to stop him. One wrong move and the soldiers would probably attack her. Neither Claude nor Serena could move, too.

When Armand who stopped near the throne put the large sword, which he carried on his shoulder, on the floor, he grasped Durandal. He raised it with both his hands and slapped it onto the floor.

A metallic crushing sound resounded and Durandal’s blade was broken from the middle.

The blade’s broken pieces flew in the air while rotating and fell down on the floor. Melisande’s eyes shone tinged with a wild enthusiasm and her loud laughter echoed in the audience room.

“As expected..... As expected, it was fake! How dare you deceive me with boring tricks at that time, Regin! What will you do about this humiliation, this anger?”

Regin could not return any words. Her heart was also about to break. Just supporting her body was the best she could do.

Having been stirred were her guards Serena and Claude. Both of them looked up to Roland and they also knew the circumstances that there was no choice but to make a fake Durandal. With that alone, they could not forgive Melisande's and Armand's action.

“You bastard.....!”

“—Stop it.”

Regin calmly held back Claude, who was about to charge into the enemy camp, with her hand. Tears slightly blurred on her pair of blue eyes. But, she softly wiped the tears with a fingertip.

It was certainly a shock that Durandal was broken. But, the act just now was proof that Melisande and company attained self-conceit beyond tolerance. No matter what they were up to, if she could gain time even a little depending on that, she would have endured it.

“Well then, let's already go to the main issue. We will kill your guards one by one and finally cut off both your hands and feet.”

Melisande emitted cruel brightness and her soldiers began to move. Serena and Claude set up their swords, but however bravely they were to fight, it would be impossible to break through a thickness of nearly 20 people and come close to Melisande.

“Melisande. I haven't yet finished talking.”

Regin said. She intended to let this situation drag on no matter what kind of humiliation she would received.

It was at that time. Cutting the air, something flew over Regin's head. When Regin noticed the sound, it hit the face of a soldier of Melisande and came out to the back of his head.

It was one arrow. Although their attention was turned to Regin and Melisande, even Serena and Claude were not able to react at once.

The soldier whose face was pierced by the arrow fell while emitting a low groan. A high-pitched metallic sound resounded as his armor crashed into the floor. While the echo made the night air shake, silence containing a lot of surprise filled the place. No one understood what on earth had happened.



From behind Regin and company, footsteps were drawing closer vigorously. At the same time as the footsteps stopped, the atmosphere howled and a new arrow came flying and pierced through the nape of another soldier of Melisande. The soldier fell down and the sound of his armor striking against the floor once again shook the atmosphere.

A person's black figure stood in front of Regin.

Everyone held their breath and gazed at that person. It was darkish red-haired youth holding a black bow. He wore leather armor and hung a quiver on his waist. Fighting spirit shone in his black pupils, he held an arrow in his mouth and stared at the large number of enemies without showing any signs of fear.

The youth's name was Tigrevurmud Vorn.

We go back a little while ago.

It was about a quarter koku ago when Tigre and company entered the Princess' bedroom. What the youth saw were many corpses lying down in a heap and walls covered with blood. He felt uneasiness since the smell of thick blood drifted in the corridor, but a ghastlier scene than what he imagined was spread out.

And then, Tigre came across Auguste's figure, which completely changed, among the many corpses.

"Auguste.....!"

Tigre, without minding that his clothes would get dirty with blood, rushed over to Auguste and held him up in his arms. It looked like Auguste was already dead, but when Tigre repeatedly called out to him, he thinly opened his eyes. When his eyes met the youth's, he subtly moved his lips.

That became the last action that he did in this world. Auguste's eyes closed again and despite the youth's desperate appeal, they never opened again.

"—Tigre."

Mashas called out to him. Tigre looked up at the old Earl with a suspicious face. Though a color of compassion appeared on both of Mashas's eyes, the old

Earl shook it off and said to the youth with a severe look.

“The figure of her Highness the Princess is nowhere to be found. She has probably escaped somewhere without a hitch.”

About several seconds was necessary before Tigre understood Mashas’s words. When the youth gritted his teeth in vexation, he softly lay down Auguste’s corpse on the floor.

Tigre knew what he had to do now.

“Sorry. I lost my composure.”

“Don’t mind it; anyone would be surprised after seeing so many corpses. Since there isn’t Titta’s figure, she has probably escaped with her Highness, but.....”

“However, father. Where on earth is her Highness the Princess.....?”

Impatience floated on Gaspar’s face.

It was then that Elen showed up accompanied by Lim.

“Tigre, huh. Looks like you’re safe.”

Seeing the figures of Elen clad in her blue battle outfit and Lim, Tigre breathed a sigh of relief. He asked them whether they saw Regin and Titta. Although Elen and Lim puzzled themselves about the sudden question, they seemed to have roughly guessed the situation after seeing the floor covered with corpses and dark red blood. Elen answered.

“Which reminds me, on the way to coming here, I saw nearly 30 soldiers. They were saying something about the audience room.”

It was Melisande and company that Elen saw. Though the fact that she didn’t attack them was partly because she was outnumbered, it was also because she wasn’t able to grasp the situation at that point. Both of them (Elen and Lim) were people from Zhcted, so it might become a problem if they imprudently fought against people from Brune.

“The audience room, huh..... If it’s there, it’ll take time to go there from here.”

Mashas shook his gray beard in vexation.

“Lord Mashas. Where is the audience room?”

Lim asked. Mashas indicated the floor at his feet with his finger.

“You could say that it’s right below us. But, all the stairs leading underneath are in quite remote places, you see.....”

Even so, they could not help but hurry anyway. When Mashas was about to start running to the corridor, Tigre called out to the silver-haired Vanadis.

“Elen, I have a request.”

Tigre’s gaze was directed towards the window close by. Thinking ‘maybe’ to Mashas’s words “right below”, putting his hands on the edge of the window and leaning forward, the youth looked closely at the night darkness.

With the night sky as the background, the capital’s cityscape stood out as it became a jet black shadow. The outline was the same as the scenery from the balcony that he saw along with Regin on past noon of today. If not for today’s call by Regin, Tigre would not have immediately recalled it.

While holding onto the edge of the window, the youth looked around. Diagonally below, the balcony at the back of the audience room could be seen. Elen stood next to the youth and similarly leaned forward.

“What is it? Shouldn’t we hurry?”

“Launch me there.”

Tigre pointed at the balcony with a finger. His voice slightly shook.

Elen’s Dragonic Tool Arifal had the power to manipulate wind. I might be able to jump from here to there in one go if she used it. Tigre thought so.

“Are you serious?”

As expected, even Elen looked at Tigre with a face which couldn’t hide the tension.

“There’s nothing other than the balcony that you can grasp. So if you fail to grasp it (balcony), you’ll immediately fall, you know? There’s also the fact the sensation may be slightly off in the night darkness, and Arifal isn’t almighty. It

isn't as if its power can get through anywhere."

The balcony was at a height of about 15 Alsins (about 15 meter) from the ground. In other words, if he failed, Tigre would be flung against the ground from that height. He would not escape from death.

"In the first place, there's no guarantee that Regin is in the audience room, right?"

"I know. But in that case, I'll know that she isn't there. And I'll also be able to send a signal."

Tigre desperately appealed to her. There was no time to argue. Elen sighed and accepted the youth's request.

"—I got it. But, it'll be only you. I don't have confidence to be able to launch many people there after all."

Carrying the black bow on his shoulder and passing the quiver around his waist, Tigre stood on the window frame. The night wind which blew from below gently brushed the youth's chin. Thanks to the light of the torches held the soldiers standing guard, he could vaguely see the situation of the ground. How high is this place from the ground? He wondered.

"Let's go!"

He cried in order to encourage himself. Tigre stared at the balcony, kicked the window frame and let his body dance in the empty sky. Strong wind blew against his back and brought Tigre close to the balcony.

But, the fall was faster than that^[18]. Did he perhaps make a wrong measurement with his eyes because of the darkness?

The balcony approached under his eyes. He stretched out his hands. He felt like he would slightly not reach. His fingers touched the top of the fence of the balcony. And they were flicked.

---I'll fall.....!

His heart was grabbed by fear. Still, he stretched out a hand hard. His fingers reached under the fence.

Tigre narrowly held onto the fence and hung from it. Sweat suddenly gushed

out and his breathing was rough.

But now that he was able to grasp it, it was his. When Tigre stretched out his other hand and firmly held onto the fence, he fixed his breathing and raised himself to the balcony.

When he got down from the balcony, he subtly heard a voice from the audience room. Tigre tightly grasped his black bow, took an arrow and jumped into the audience room.

With a dumbfounded face, Melisande was staring at Tigre who suddenly appeared. But, when she recognized Tigre accurately, her complexion completely changed.

“You’re.....!”

With a face so tinged with anger that she did not turn even to Regin, Melisande cried.

“So, you’re the enemy of my son and my husband!”

Tigre opened his eyes wide. Be it the fight against Zion or the fight against Duke Thenardier, there was for him no place to feel ashamed. But, Melisande’s cry surprised Tigre.

“Kill him!”

Throwing away her composure until now, Melisande shouted. The soldiers brandished their swords and started moving.

“Regin, Titta, step back!”

While shouting, Tigre nocked arrows to the black bow. He shot them. Although three soldiers fell down after receiving each an arrow to the forehead from a short distance, the other soldiers attacked like surging waves without being daunted.

Claude and Serena stood in front of Tigre and swung their swords. Two enemies were killed at once and sank in a spray of blood.

But, they were outnumbered. Even if they defeated one or two people, three

or four enemies would rush. Claude and Serena stood in a line so as to protect each other and swung their swords devoting themselves to defense, but even so several blades grazed the two people's bodies.

When they were forced to retreat, Tigre could no longer step back; and the five people were cornered in no time.

Suddenly, wind passed. Letting silver hair brighten within the very dim light, a new intruder jumped into the battlefield.

"Elen!"

Tigre raised a voice of delight. As if to answer it, Elen also raised her voice.

"I'm one of Zhcted's Vanadis, Eleonora Viltaria! Is there anyone who is going to challenge a Vanadis?!"

The names 'Zhcted' and 'Vanadis' made the soldiers falter for an instant. And for Elen, that instant was enough. The Wind Princess of the Silver flash boldly jumped among the enemy and mercilessly swung her long sword.

The number of Melisande's soldiers was decreasing one by one. Melisande stood stock still with a pale face. Until just a little while ago, she was unmistakably the victor. Or so it should have been.

Who would have imagined that only one Vanadis would literally completely change the battle's progress?

"You bastards! What did you do to Melisande-sama?!"

Armand raised his large sword and attacked Elen. But, before he entered Elen's range, the arrow which Tigre shot pierced Armand's forehead. The viscount with a big body uttered a short scream as if his breathing was clogged up and fell forward and died as is.

There were people who somehow tried to aim at Regin, but Claude and Serena who fixed their breathing stood in their way. The two knights perfectly understood their role. They just had to leave the offensive to Tigre and Elen, and devote themselves to protecting Regin.

Regin held a torch, stood so as to protect Titta and watched over the battle's progress. Though the spectacle, where bloodshed and death followed the

sound of arms, was ghastly and it was hard to look straight at it, she did not avert her eyes.

“Fight! Do you think that we can surrender after coming so far?!”

Melisande desperately shouted at her subordinates who faltered. Just as she said, even if they surrendered now, there was no way that they would be forgiven.

The soldiers, who resolved themselves, attacked Claude and Serena all at once. There was no other way to survive than trying to hold the Princess hostage.

Claude and Serena respectively swung their swords and cut down Melisande's soldiers. Aiming at that moment, Melisande moved. When she picked up a fragment of Durandal scattered on the floor, she attacked Regin with the momentum to bump into her.

Regin reflexively stuck out the torch to Melisande. Though Melisande did not falter, her view was burnt and she missed her aim. The fragment of Durandal only made a straight red wound on Regin's flank. The two women fell down as they got entangled.

The first one to get up was Melisande, but she screamed and staggered. Fire coiled about on her clothes. When she fell down again, the flame of the torch spread.

Tightly grasping the fragment of Durandal as is, Melisande violently twisted her body. There was a hole immediately next to her. The hole of the hidden passage connecting the Princess' bedroom to the audience room.

Breaking her posture, Melisande fell. The ears of Regin who finally got up heard a heavy sound as if something was flung.

Though not to the extent of Melisande, fire also spread on Regin's clothes. After putting it out while strongly tapping it with her hands, Regin picked up the torch. She was so tense that she did not feel the pain of the burn.

When she looked into the hole, darkness was spreading. The flame of the torch did not reach to the bottom of the hole. Even the fire sticking to Melisande's clothes seemed to have vanished due to the shock of the fall.

“—Your Highness. I will go look.”

Serena approached. The battle was over and there were only the six people of Tigre’s side in the audience room

Although she fell in the hole, it was not certain that Melisande had died. Considering that, what Serena said was right. But, Regin shook her head.

“Serena. I will go down, too.”

She said so in a strong tone in a way of saying that only that she could not yield. Serena consented on the condition that she got down first.

While the four people Tigre, Claude, Elen and Titta watched over, Serena and Regin went down to the hole using the handles. The two women reached the bottom of the hole before long.

Melisande had fell down to the bottom of the hole. Serena and Regin who saw her figure held their breath.

Her neck was twisted in a strange direction and her chest has been pierced by the fragment of Durandal. The blood which flowed out dyed her clothes red and spread even to the floor.

Melisande was not yet dead. While her hands shook and her lips convulsed, she moved her eyes and looked up at Regin.

“I, I.....”

In a blurred voice, Melisande continued.

“I..... just, wanted..... to return. In, those days.....”

“In those days” probably meant the days when her husband and son were in good health and the Thenardier House built an unwavering position/status as a great noble of Brune.

Regin did not say anything. She just slightly moved her lips and uttered soundless words.

Me, too.

Regin, too, if she could rewind time, she would like to do so. To return it to the time when her father King Faron was still in good health.

To the time when there was no problem even though she lived as an inconspicuous Prince.

But, the deceased can't be brought back to life. Even if one got back what was lost, it would never be as it was originally. The breath of many people are carved into it and become something different. Above all, now she had an ideal she wanted to accomplish.

She could only look forward and advance; even if it was a path full of hardships.

Melisande's eyes were to the wrong direction and lost strength.

The revolt was over.

In a place after going down the slope a little from the royal palace, which was halfway up the Luberon Mountain, there was one man. It was Maximilian Bennis Ganelon.

The slant of the area, where he was, was steep; it was a place where the foothold was also unstable because it was covered by trees and strangely twisted and tall grass, and thus no one, even the soldiers working in the royal palace, approached there. After having received the attack by Tigre's black bow, he came straight here.

When looking up, there was the royal palace which did not lose its splendor even in the night's darkness.

"Well then, how will it turn out?"

Ganelon bragged with an expression like an angler who hung down a fishing rod.

"How will what turn out?"

The question to his soliloquy was emitted from the side of Ganelon. Ganelon, showing no behavior of being cautious, turned only his gaze there. Space soundlessly warped before his eyes and Valentina carrying a scythe on her shoulder appeared.

When she got down on the ground while letting her skirt lightly flutter, she

unusually frowned.

“My clothes got dirty.”

“Weren’t they already dirty?”

The outfit of Ganelon, who said so while laughing, was awful. His silk clothes were stained with black soot and were ripped here and there; especially the side from the left shoulder was completely blown off and his left arm became bare. His splendid bald head was laid bare without his hat. His trousers and shoes were visibly spoiled.

Seeing Ganelon’s appearance, Valentina funnily smiled.

“Your hand has been awfully burnt, eh.”

“Yea. It was more than expected. By the way, why did you chase me? Do you want to engage in small chats?”

“Something like that. Honestly, I didn’t think that you were there.”

Holding the scythe behind her back, Valentina bent her head slightly to one side. And she revealed a charming smile which would probably captivate most men. But, Ganelon only lifted the edge of his mouth.

“If you talk, I’ll also talk. How about it?”

“I understand.”

Valentina easily consented and explained the reason why she helped Tigre.

Since the time when ten people including Baron Celpet attacked Tigre’s room, she has been watching the youth’s state.

After Celpet and his men were defeated, she followed Tigre and company while keeping a certain distance. The riot was not yet over. Tigre might use the black bow’s power somewhere.

Then, Ganelon appeared.

Ganelon who finished hearing her talk laughed while shaking his shoulders.

“Is it so funny?”

“Of course it is”, as he replied so, Ganelon revealed the smile of an

accomplice.

“I came here for the same purpose after all. In order to see Vorn’s power.”

“But considering it was only for that, I feel like you went around killing soldiers more than necessary though.”

While looking up at the night sky, Valentina pointed out in an indifferent tone. Ganelon also smiled wryly as she seemed to have noticed him. He did not particularly intend to hide it. He only didn’t say it since it was an extra.

“It’s just a little help to Melisande. —That I’m also here.”

“Help, is it? From you, who is always thinking about himself?”

“Next time, I’ll send you a mirror of good quality to Osterode.”

After returning sarcasm with irony, Ganelon asked.

“This revolt — though it’s too small to call it a revolt. Do you think it’ll succeed?”

“I don’t know the concrete plan, but currently, judging only from what is happening in the royal palace, I’d say that either side has the possibility to fall down.”

“It’s as you say.”

Ganelon unnaturally sighed while being impressed by the black-haired Vanadis’ sense of observation.

“I rampaged just slightly in two places of the royal palace. It was in order to make it hard for the soldiers to contact their comrades while attracting their attention. If not for that, Melisande and her men would have been suppressed long ago.”

Having poisoned the soldiers’ meal was certainly an effective move. Having taken action tonight was also right. But still, Ganelon judged that they would fail. They are too few in number. At that rate, there would have probably been not even one person who would be able to reach Regin.

“So, I’ve connected their wish just a little.”

“You personally killing Princess Regin might have as well been fast/simple,

right?”

“I have no reason to go so far as to kill her.”

Ganelon plainly said so.

Whether Regin survives or dies, either was fine for him. That’s why, even when Regin escaped from the battlefield to Agnes two years ago, he did not assertively chase her; and also the trap which he had set in the underground of Artishem was not something meant to certainly kill her.

“If she comes rolling before me, I’ll kill her; but there’s no need for me to bring myself to expressly go to visit her. After all, that girl is concerned with neither you Vanadises, nor those guys, nor the goddess.”

By “those guys”, he meant the beings called demons. If there was something which Ganelon were to think seriously and act about, then it would be only about something related to these three parties.

“You said that the fact that you’re also here was to help Melisande though.”

To Valentina’s words, Ganelon indicated with a finger a thicket in a slightly remote place.

“There are many secret passages in that royal palace, you see? Like one connecting from the Princess’ bedroom to here.”

“So, will you ambush them?”

“I wonder. As I said, there’re many passages. There’s no guarantee that they’d definitely come out from here.”

This meant there were plenty of possibilities that they would come out to a place, which was not here, using another passage. When Valentina nodded as she consented, she changed the topic.

“At any rate, your coming to check his power means..... that it’s near, right?”

Ganelon’s both eyes, which were so thin that one didn’t know whether or not they were opened, emitted a whitish light. But, he immediately released his caution and smiled.

“It’s soon. If you can bring Vorn in, I’ll protect him for you.”

“They are plenty enough of Vanadis who want to protect him.”

Letting her black hair flutter in the night wind, Valentina chuckled. Ganelon was about to return words, but she suddenly looked up at the royal palace. He boringly knitted his brows.

“Damn Goddess. She butted in.....”

Ganelon sighed. As if seeming to have suddenly lost his motivation, he turned his back on Valentina. And he soundlessly walked away within the darkness.

Chapter 4 - Determination

By Melisande's death, the curtain lowered on the revolt.

It was just at this time that Badouin and Viscount Augre grasped the situation. Though they woke up to the roaring sound made when Tigre shot the arrow with the "power" from the black bow; because they tried to understand the situation first, they were late in taking action.

The two men, who were shocked, hurriedly finished only the minimum change of clothes and came to Regin's bedroom. Regin had moved there in order to issue instructions.

Cloths smeared with medicine were pasted on the Princess' cheeks and arms, and bandages peeped out from the gaps of her clothes. But, Regin's expression was dignified and there was nothing except only her disheveled hair that indicated her fatigue.

Towards the two old retainers who apologized with faces where their hair and mustache were disordered, Regin shook her head.

"As you can see, I am safe, so there is nothing to worry about. More than that, I am glad you two are safe."

And then, Regin talked with the two men at once about things to come.

About whether they should announce that Melisande had caused a revolt which was suppressed, and that she had lost her life. Among the noble feudal lords, there would probably be people, who would think that Regin had pinned a crime on Melisande and assassinated her after a power struggle.

"Even if there is some danger, I think that we should announce it."

Regin said so. Melisande's death would give a blow to Sachstein which was in contact with her. Though it wouldn't reach the point where they would give up on further invading and retreat, it would certainly be of help to Tigre and

company who would fight against them from now on.

“What will we do about the people doubting it?”

“We will just ignore them.”

Regin quickly replied.

“Many soldiers who worked in the royal palace suffered for them. They lost their friends and colleagues. If they^[19] hear the story from them, they will eventually understand what Melisande and her men did. I have no business with people who are not going to investigate even at least that much. Even so, if they still try to say something—”

As a quiet anger boiled in her pair of blue eyes, Regin continued.

“I will regard it as an insult towards those who have protected me and take suitable measures.”

Badouin and Augre solemnly straightened their posture and once again bowed to the Princess.

When Regin’s safety was ensured and Badouin and company became able to take command, there was nothing that Tigre could do in the royal palace. Even so, Tigre asked Mashas whether there was anything he could do, but the reply was as followed.

“You, who don’t even know where which room is, are bound to get lost. Take a break.”

Though his words were cold, there was warmth in the old Earl’s look as he was worried about Tigre. As there was also the fact that he was emotionally exhausted due to Auguste’s death, Tigre decided to obediently follow Mashas’ words and sleep.

Different guest rooms were respectively prepared for Tigre and Titta. This was because Tigre’s room was in an awful state as there were many corpses scattered about and neither Tigre nor Mashas nor Regin permitted letting Titta rest in the room next to such a room.

While Tigre and company were sleeping, in the royal palace anybody without

exception who could do something was pressed with post-processing.

They had to bury the soldiers who had lost their lives and also had to arrange informing their bereaved families. It was also necessary to calculate the get-well money (compensation). They also had to wash away the blood stuck to the walls and floor.

The corpses of the people, who followed Melisande, were naturally buried in a different place.

There was one corridor where terrible traces of destruction, as if it was hit by a giant or a dragon coming out of a fairy tale, were displayed; but its inquiry was postponed. What should be given priority was treatment and restoration.

Including Baron Celpet who tried to kill Tigre, the people who took part in the revolt were all caught and imprisoned.

They gave the name of the person who planned this revolt, and that person was also apprehended. It was Earl Delbord, an old-timer who successively held the positions of secretary and councilor, and had worked in the royal palace for more than 20 years. As Badouin and Mashas were close to him, they were unable to hide their shock.

“Why did you do such a foolish thing?”

To Mashas who painfully frowned and asked, Delbord answered without changing his expression.

“I can understand neither Princess Regin nor Earl Vorn.”

Regin, who, although she was the late King Faron’s child, had a past of being brought up as a Prince and now, was governing Brune.

Tigre, who, while being a person from Brune, excelled at the bow, defeated Duke Thenardier although he was a small noble, had a lot of close friends in Zhcted and even distinguished himself militarily in Asvarre.

“I could still understand Lady Melisande. Serving someone that I cannot understand is.....”

Though Delbord said no more than that, Mashas understood what he wanted to say. Seeing off the retreating figure of his old friend who was taken to prison,

Mashas sighed.

“Her Highness Regin was going to compromise eagerly. Like Auguste, there were also people trying to escape from the contempt to the bow. What will those, who have accumulated experiences as they got older, do if they cannot act like them.....?”

Mashas, who muttered so, turned 57 this year. His strength grew as years gone by, and the disposition and belief to never forgive compromise or concession inside him as well.

Delbord was probably holding some sort of conviction and disposition regarding Brune’s traditions. Because those who were supporting his plan were few in numbers, as for Mashas’ feelings, he wanted to find at least some hope.



When the dawn broke and the sun which rose from the east sky began to go down to the west, Tigre visited the graveyard outside the capital along with Titta.

In a place that the temple, which believed in the War God Triglav, managed, the people of the Calvados Knight Squadron including Auguste were buried here.

It was a quiet graveyard surrounded by greenery. In front of a brand-new gravestone where Auguste’s name was carved, Tigre and Titta prayed to the gods for the peace of Auguste’s soul.

The funeral services have not yet been held. Because bodies decay/rot and might become the origin of an epidemic, they had to complete the burial first.

“Tigre-sama. Auguste-san said that he leaves Regin-sama to me.....”

After they left the graveyard, Titta’s eyes were swollen from crying. Though she did her best to not cry before entering the graveyard, she wasn’t able to bear it when she saw Auguste’s tomb.

Tigre, not returning straight to the royal palace, stopped by at a suitable open

space and took a break with Titta. He bought a drink at a nearby stall and gave it to the chestnut-haired girl. It was something which mixed smashed strawberries in light wine and adjusted the taste with honey.

“It was really surprising when Auguste became a knight.”

While looking at a distant place, Tigre reminisced about old days. Among the people of Alsace, those who became knights could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In the first place, there were few people who intended to become a knight. As far as Tigre knew, it was only Auguste.

Though there was the fact that in order to become a knight he went to Urz’s mansion for a period of time, Auguste looked after Tigre and Titta very much when they were children.

In addition, when Tigre fought against the Muozinel army two years ago, Auguste had rushed to help him.

Moreover, this was a story he’d heard from Regin, but it seemed that Auguste had used crossbow. If he was still alive, the Calvados Knight Squadron might have become a special group.

“Auguste.....”

Tigre muttered his name. They were in the royal palace in order to protect Regin. And, they had splendidly accomplished their duty. Tigre was in a position where he had to praise their brave fight.

But due to the feeling of loneliness spreading in his heart, he could not readily spin words of praise. After a long silence, Tigre only muttered “thank you”.

As they stayed in the open space for about half a koku, Tigre and Titta returned to the royal palace before the sunset. There were a lot of things that the youth had to do.

As he renewed his feelings, Tigre headed to Elen’s room with Titta.

When he arrived at Elen’s room, other people have already gathered. Mashas, Gerard, Elen, Lim and Valentina surrounded a big circular table in the center of the room. Several maps and documents that looked like data were put on the

table.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting.”

“I also came just now. So don’t mind it.”

Elen answered so. With the six people including Tigre, they would talk about how to fight against Sachstein from now on. Mashas left all the matters regarding the royal palace to Badouin, Augre and others and decided to devote himself to coping with the Sachstein army.

The tools to serve tea were put in a corner of the room, and with practiced hands, Titta used them and served tea in silver cups for the number of people here.

Waiting for the silver cups to be put on the table, Gerard opened his mouth first.

“The Moonlight Knights army is currently 10,000 strong. Here, the feudal lords’ combined army of 18,000 and an alliance force of Knight Squadrons of 7000 will be added. All of them consent to coming under Earl Vorn’s command.”

“My 3000 soldiers from Osterode have arrived at Nice, too; they are all infantry. I do not know whether they will be of assistance, but please use them.”

Having said that was Valentina with a silver cup in one hand. Because Osterode was in the northeast of Zhcted, it took them time to come down to here.

With this, the Moonlight Knights army became a big army of 38,000.

“I’m thankful that the number of allies has increased, but will there be enough food and materials?”

Elen asked with her arms folded. Gerard nodded with a smile full of confidence.

“Please, rest at ease on that point. We will prepare the necessary amount even if there are 50,000 soldiers.”

The statement of this dark brown-haired secretary was by no means big

talk/bragging. In the civil war two years ago, he regulated the supply of food and materials of the Silver Meteor Army and even undertook its distribution.

“I leave it to you then. So, how are the enemy’s numbers and movement?”

To Tigre’s question, Gerard answered without looking at the documents at hand.

“Estimating it to be a somewhat larger quantity, please think that they numbered about 50,000.”

The room’s atmosphere was tinged with a sense of tension. It was 12,000 more than their side (Brune). Mashas asked.

“Wasn’t 50,000 the number of when the enemy broke through the western border? I heard that they’d fought twice since then though.”

“Those two times were large-scale battles at that. Afterwards, we received another three reports of the fights against the Sachstein army.”

“Then, Gerard. Are you saying that the enemy fought five times and all those times were always landslide victories?”

To Tigre who made a look that said he couldn’t believe it, Gerard nodded with a serious face.

“I will briefly explain.”

Saying so, Gerard looked around the people surrounding the table and began to talk.

It was nearly 20 days ago when the 50,000 Sachstein troops invaded after crossing the western border.

At the border with Sachstein there was the Navarre Fort, and the Navarre Knight Squadron attached there to protect it.

After the death of Roland who’d acted as their leader, the vice-leader Olivier gathered the knights as the acting head.

Even if they had lost Roland, they boasted of an outstanding strength among the Knight Squadrons existing in Brune. Until now, Sachstein had set skirmishes

several times, but they repelled them each time and didn't let them approach Brune's lands.

“—But, the Sachstein army crossed the border and got in. What happened to the Navarre Knight Squadron? Did they lose?”

When Elen asked, Gerard uttered a surprising answer.

“They didn't fight against the Navarre Knight Squadron. It seemed that they ran through a wasteland greatly deviating from the highway which the Knight Squadron doesn't keep an eye on at midnight.”

The Navarre Knight Squadron noticed the enemy's invasion at dawn. However, they were not able to chase the enemy.

One reason was that, as a result of scouting, they knew that the enemy was a large army of 50,000. Although the Navarre Knight Squadron had increased their ranks, their numbers did not reach 5000.

Another reason was another Sachstein army had showed up near the border.

Though they were few in number, they had prepared castle siege weapons and showed signs to begin attacking immediately should the Navarre Knight Squadron divide their forces from the fort^[20]. Sending messengers to various places was the best they could do, as the Navarre Knight Squadron were unable to move from the fort.

“It seems that the 50,000 Sachstein troops which invaded are all cavalrymen, the enemy commander's name is Leonhardt Von Schmidt. It is said he is a noble of Sachstein and a General.”

“Just now, you said all of them are cavalrymen, but is that true?”

Elen knitted her brows. The silver-haired Vanadis, who has several times organized her troops with only cavalrymen, thus knew well the hardships to do so. Considering her experience, unless certain conditions were gathered, it was impossible to organize an army of only cavalrymen which would invade an enemy territory with a number of 50,000.

One of these so-called conditions was that the soldiers riding horses should be able to take enough of care enough of their horses.

Just making them eat fodder and drink water was not enough. They should be able to treat the horses' wounds, ascertain whether or not they would contract disease and, depending on the situation, separate from their horses. They should also be able to put horse shoes into the horse' hooves, and adjust saddles.

Furthermore, there was also the problem of food and water. Without means to supply them (horses) regularly, the army would eventually stop moving due to starvation and thirst.

Therefore, in the case that Elen moved only cavalrymen, she set them to a short term decisive battle. If not, then she knew that both humans and horses would overexert themselves. In the case that they moved for a long term, they would have to secure water and food, people with blacksmith skills and people who can look after horses would have to campaign as infantry.

Gerard strongly nodded at Elen's question.

"I also took a look at the reports several times and asked for the story from those who took part in the battle. So, there is no mistaking it."

Gerard returned to the explanation. The Sachstein army, which broke through the border, advanced to the east while attacking and pillaging villages and small towns.

"They have probably received a map of the western part from Melisande. The targets for their pillaging were too precise. And, they don't approach forts and cities with solid defense."

Tigre was perplexed at Mashas' explanation.

Why didn't the enemy aim for the forts or cities? Wasn't it wise to capture a fort or a city and go ahead while being based there?

Anyway, the Sachstein army advanced to the east and confronted the allied forces of noble feudal lords, who governed Brune's western part, and the Knight Squadrons, who protected a fort located at an important position of the highway.

In contrast with the Sachstein army of 50,000, the Brune army was smaller with 30,000. But, Brune's side had the geographical advantage. The Redon

plains, which became the battlefield, was an area with gentle ups and downs and by the cavalrymen's charges which Brune excelled at, they should have been able to trample down the enemy.

Not to mention, the Brune army's morale was high. On the day before fighting against the Sachstein army and the day before that, they had sheltered several hundreds and thousands of people wandering in the plains. They were people who had encountered the Sachstein army's plundering, were robbed of their food and escaped after their villages and towns were burnt.

"Their pillaging was strange though....."

Gerard cocked his head in puzzlement as to say that he couldn't understand it.

"Apparently, there were almost no casualties. The Sachstein soldiers stole the food and burnt to ashes every house after gathering the residents in one place, then sent them off altogether saying to go the Brune army."

"Does it mean that they didn't kill people?"

Not only Tigre, but also Mashas, Elen and Lim made expressions saying that it was unexpected.

They didn't know at all what the Sachstein army was thinking about. It was hard to understand that they didn't intend to injure the people even though they were pillaging.

"For now, let me continue with the story. Our army met the Sachstein army in the Redon plains, but they were defeated in one battle."

Repressing his feeling of anger, Gerard explained.

It was a complete defeat. In contrast with Brune's side that suffered more than 10,000 deceased and a number of injured that was even greater; the Sachstein army's deceased and injured altogether did not reach even 1000.

After quenching his throat with a silver cup, Gerard presented the documents put on the table to Tigre and company.

"It seems that at first, both armies clashed head on. And that's when the Sachstein army started to retreat gradually and they (Brune's side) advanced

taking advantage of that, two detached enemy units appeared at their rear before they knew it.”

As they were confused at the enemy attack from the rear, the enemy at the front rapidly drew near and the Brune army was surrounded in the blink of an eye. Then, the encirclement was gradually narrowed and they were killed.

“On a flat plain, the enemy’s detached forces could at least be seen though.”

Elen looked puzzled with her arms folded. Mashas said while taking a look at the documents.

“In the report, it seems to be only written that they’d suddenly appeared, eh..... Anyway, so it means that this, dozens of days ago, became the first battle against Sachstein.”

Then two days later, the Brune army somehow managed to reorganize. The noble feudal lords and Knight Squadrons that didn’t make it in time for the battle of the other day also joined; altogether they made a large army of 30,000.

Meanwhile, the Sachstein army, while repeating their pillaging attacking towns and villages, advanced to the east. It was not like they were not passing through the highway, but since they circumvented to the North and South, it was far from a straight route.

Why didn’t the Sachstein army advance straight ahead to the east? Though the people who thought so were not few, their doubt was drowned out by the huge anger that their allies had.

Though they did not understand the Sachstein army’s thoughts, it was a fact that Brune’s land was damaged by them. For the noble feudal lords whose territories were thoughtlessly treaded on, it was an unforgivable act; and for the knights too, it was a problem involving their honor.

After having sheltered the citizens who escaped just like the time of the previous battle, the Brune army which took up position in the field of Laval bid defiance to the Sachstein army.

“And they lost. In exactly the same way.”

Gerard shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

As expected, two detached forces of the Sachstein army appeared in the rear of the Brune army.

“If they didn’t notice the second time either, then it’s hard to imagine that they failed to notice it. What I can think of immediately is that either they had prepared the detached forces from before the battle, or made them take a great detour outside of the battlefield.”

Lim said while comparing the map with the documents. Mashas agreed.

“There is nothing to consider other than that. If there was a forest or a hill aside, I don’t think that they could detach units without the other side noticing on a plain without anything obstructing one’s view. It would be right to think that they’d let the detached forces act independently from the beginning.”

“If that’s the case, then that Schmidt is quite a troublesome opponent.”

Elen groaned with her arms folded. If they made a bad move, they would be targeted by a detached force circumventing from outside the battle and destroying every single one of them. Even if it didn’t turn out as such, when they finally arrived at the battlefield, it wouldn’t be unusual that they would be of no use as the situation would have completely changed.

But, they (Sachstein) used it effectively twice. So, the Sachstein army’s supreme commander Schmidt was definitely a formidable opponent.

“What kind of person is that Schmidt?”

When Tigre asked, Gerard answered to the extent that he knew. He was a Sachstein noble in his forties and he seemed to be a man whom the King had a deep trust in.

Sachstein frequently caused fights along its borders with the neighboring countries such as Brune and Asvarre, but whenever this man led cavalymen, Brune was always forced into hard fights.

“He is rumored to be the best in Sachstein when it comes to the command of cavalry. In this war, we were made to realize that that rumor was true.”

Regarding the third battle afterwards, Gerard did not talk about it very much.

This was because it was something like the Sachstein army only eliminating a sporadic resistance as they advanced while repeating their pillaging.

The Brune army which attacked numbered from about 5000 to 6000 and Schmidt, too, without the need to use detached forces, kicked them about by a charge from the front.

From the latest information, the Sachstein army seemed to be in a place approximately six or seven days from the capital Nice.

“But, I don’t understand.”

Elen groaned with folded arms.

“Nearly 20 days have already passed since they got into the territory of Brune, right? What do they do about their food and materials?”

“It seems that they secure water from a river or lake and provide food and materials by pillaging.”

Gerard answered with a dejected expression. Tigre and company looked at each other. Mashas stretched his hand to the map on the table and traced the March course of the Sachstein army drawn on the map with a finger.

This March course was something which connected several points where the enemy was detected and was drawn with guesses, but still it could only be described as nonsense.

If they had advanced to the east straight through the highway after breaking through the western border, they would have already arrived at the capital Nice. That is, even if they were to spend a few days in the battle against the Brune army which was going to obstruct their March.

The marching speed of them, who moved with only cavalry, was double that of an army of infantry. For example, the Sachstein army could travel the distance, which the Moonlight Knights army covered in two days, in a day.

However, they advanced as if disregarding the highway and it was just as if they were moving on a whim, such as when one wondered whether they would suddenly head to the north, they suddenly went south.

“When I saw this figure/graph for the first time, I wondered why those guys

are advancing in such a way. Even though with their speed, they would arrive here at Nice in less than ten days if they advanced straight through the highway.”

“So that’s it.....”

A groan which mixed understanding with anger leaked out from Tigre’s mouth.

Because the whole Sachstein army was composed of cavalry, they could move at an extraordinary march speed.

Tigre thought so, but that thought was one step from being enough.

“What brings about their tremendous speed is only because they are a group of only cavalry. In addition to that, this is because they replenished their supplies on-site.”

The marching speed of an army took into consideration the infantry as the standard. When considering the cavalry as the standard, only the cavalry would stand out and all aside from them would be late; because the speed of the transport squad, which carried the food and materials, was not different from the infantry’s.

In order to consider the cavalry as the standard, one must detach/separate not only the infantry, but also the transport squad. And so, the enemy had implemented that.

With this, Tigre and company understood the reason why the enemy didn’t occupy a city or a fort. For them, a city or fort could not become a capture target. After all, the siege weapons were only obstructive baggage for them.

In fact, even if Brune abandoned a city or a fort entirely, the enemy would probably ignore it. They intended to challenge only an open field. And they had confidence that if it was an open field, they could unconditionally win.

“I see. So that’s the reason why they move around consistently. There is a saying that, “when a certain fish doesn’t keep swimming, it’ll die”, and it looks like they are doing the same thing.”

While unfolding her arms and extending her hand to her silver cup, Elen

sighed. Valentina suddenly chuckled when she looked at Elen.

“Eleonora. I think that in the enemy’s pillaging, there is one other intention aside from resupplying.”

“An intention aside from resupplying.....?”

Though the silver-haired Vanadis knitted her brows, she nodded as she immediately understood.

“They incite the anger of the Brune army by repetitively pillaging, bring them into battle and then win. Are they inducing estrangement through repeating that?”

“Yes. If I was the enemy commander, I’d do so. Doing so^[21] without killing the territory people is definitely for that reason, too. After all, no matter how strong they are, the people who survived would disperse.”

Valentina said something frightening with her smile as is.

If they attacked a town or village, the Brune army would appear to repel them. And after having defeated that Brune army, they would make an offer to the noble feudal lords ruling the western territories, and their territories’ people.

Saying “rather than following this powerless Kingdom that protects you, how about following us?”

The noble feudal lords would not agree immediately. But, what would they do if villages and towns within their territory were attacked and robbed one after another? When they think that the country called Brune and the ruler called Regin are not reliable, would they nevertheless stay loyal to the kingdom?

As for the territory people, they would without doubt show a more easy-to-understand reaction. If they weren’t imposed with heavy taxes or there wasn’t excessive tyranny, then they wouldn’t show that much interest in the change in ruler.

“If I have to add one more thing, the reason why they let go the people alive might also be, while making the other side (Brune’s side) take time to shelter those people, to investigate the Brune army’s position using the territory

people instead of their scouts”

Tigre grieved. The man called Schmidt, who led this army, was not just strong in battle. In a different meaning from Kreuger, he was a frightening opponent.

“In other words, we must absolutely win in the next battle. That’s what it means, right?”

With an expression which could not hide his nervousness, Tigre looked at Mashas. The old Earl nodded with a stern face.

There was no doubt that one of the things, which held on to the heart of the noble feudal lords who fought in Brune’s western part, was Tigre’s existence. Even excluding his fame as the young hero, it was only Tigre leading the Moonlight Knights army that won after fighting with the Sachstein army.

So, the Moonlight Knights army’s defeat might not be just one defeat, but the defeat of Brune itself.

“But, how do we fight?”

Elen cast her gaze at the map on the table with a difficult expression.

“There are only plains everywhere from the capital to the west. I won’t say that there are hardly any mountains and hills, but there’s no guarantee that the enemy would come if we move troops forward in such places (mountains or hills).”

“Valentina, do you have any plans?”

Tigre called out to the black-haired Vanadis who was looking over the documents in silence since some time now.

Valentina looked at him with a smile. He hasn’t yet talked with her about last night’s incident. There was no such leisure.

“There is a way where we can easily fight though.”

Valentina said so with a smile while drinking the tea in her silver cup. Though Tigre reflexively looked at the black-haired Vanadis with a cautious look, he had no plans for the moment. While mentally preparing himself, he prompted her to continue by nodding.

“It is to pour poison into the river which they will use.”

Valentina said in a tone as if it was nothing.

Elen and Lim threw gazes filled with unpleasant feelings at her, Mashas was at a loss for words as he opened wide his eyes. Gerard was dumbfounded and Tigre too unintentionally clenched his fist. Particularly the three Brune people were sensitive to the word “poison” because of last night’s revolt.

Warding off their reactions with an unconcerned face, the black-haired Vanadis continued.

“All of them being cavalry means that they helplessly depend on horses. In that case, we should aim at the horses. It’s simple, isn’t it?”

“But, how many towns and villages do you think will receive damage if we pour poison into the river?”

Mashas said as he was unable to bear it anymore. Even towards the words of the old Earl, who has lived more than two times more than her, Valentina argued without her complexion changing one bit.

“Is it not better than suffering a sixth defeat?”

“Vanadis-dono. It may be a rude way of speaking, but are you able to propose such means because here is Brune?”

Mashas said with a bitter expression. It was a remark that he would absolutely not speak of usually. Even so, he said it probably because he imagined his feelings of disgust towards the means of poison, and the towns and villages which would receive damage due to that.

“—Lord Mashas. I think that you have said a little too much.”

Although finding it regretful, Tigre rebuked the old Earl in a slightly severe tone. If he did not say it now even unwillingly, only the fact that Mashas had slandered Valentina, who was a comrade in arms, would remain.

Mashas revealed a startled face and apologized to Valentina.

“I am sorry. I have said too much.”

“No. It is natural that a person from Brune thinks dearly of the people and the

land of Brune.”

Valentina shook her head with a smile as to say that she didn’t mind it.

“But, actually what will we do?”

As to change the atmosphere of the place, Elen leaned forward.

“They are people who have defeated an enemy of 30,000 twice. We’ll lose if we don’t take any measures.”

“If they aim for the capital, there is the option of closing all the gates of the ramparts enclosing the capital and bringing it into a siege battle though.”

Lim stated her opinion. Although, when looking at her blue pupils in her unsociable face, one could clearly understand that she didn’t think it was an effective mean. It seemed that she tried saying that in order to change the atmosphere of the place just like Elen.

“If we do that, those guys will probably repeat their pillaging by attacking villages and towns at hand. And Brune will become a burnt field.”

And then, as Valentina had said just a little while ago, the Sachstein army would probably ask the noble feudal lords and the territory people. About which one was more comfortable to follow.

Tigre grieved. Kreuger was also a formidable enemy, but Schmidt was a frighteningly troublesome opponent. Precisely because there were these two men, Sachstein would bring itself to invade.

“I guess trying to probe the enemy’s attitude just like the time with Kreuger would be difficult.”

“In the worst case, there is still a possibility of waiting and seeing what happens. Besides, our movements and habits might have already been grasped.”

“If the enemy is only cavalry, then what do you say about thinking of a means to stop cavalry’s pace?”

Lim proposed as such. Tigre nodded, and the six people respectively gave their opinions.

“How about sprinkling oil on the ground, lure the enemy and attack them with fire?”

Mashas made a wry face at Elen’s suggestion.

“In this season, the danger of attacking with fire at this place is great.”

Brune’s lands were often described as “like having spread a vivid green carpet”. The gentle plains of ups and downs made up the majority of the territory. Moreover, it was spring now.

If one were to imprudently set fire there, the flames would spread in the blink of an eye and even the one who set the fire would be unable to suppress it.

Although Tigre handled fire arrows in the battle with Kreuger, it was simply because the target was the top of a small hill and he judged that there was no fear of it becoming uncontrollable that he shot them.

“Shall we prepare a stockade?”

Lim said. A stockade was something where long stakes with sharp tips were lined up side-by-side. The stakes were not vertical, but inclined forward diagonally. It was in order to skewer the enemy who charged.

Among anti-cavalry weapons, it was often used; but there was a shortcoming. First, because each stake was heavy, they were not easy to carry. In a wide battlefield such as a grassy plain, on top of detouring the enemy, they might even obstruct their allies’ movement.

“It’s difficult. The enemy is adopting a way of fighting that fully uses their mobility. If we find a battlefield where we can use the stockade.....”

“I don’t know very well the weather of the west, but can we expect rain or fog?”

“It’ll be difficult until we reach summer. Still, we’ll starve to death if we wait until summer.”

Mashas ruefully shook his head at Gerard’s words.

“Lord Mashas. Are there any wetlands when going from the capital to the west?”

It was Tigre who asked this time. While listening to everyone's opinion, one idea popped into the youth's head. Mashas stroked his gray beard with a wondering face.

"It's not like there's none, but..... If we were to fight in a wetland, it'll be difficult to fight for our cavalry, too. Besides, the enemy has a map. They won't take the bait."

Tigre looked around at the five peoples' faces and explained his thought/idea.

"If it's that much, I can prepare it before you leave the capital."

Gerard answered so. Elen also nodded with a smile.

"It isn't bad, I guess. I'm in."

Lim showed her agreement by nodding silently, and Valentina too said nothing. Although Mashas slightly groaned, in the end he breathed out and said this.

"I got it. Since it doesn't seem like you'll jump out, I guess it's fine."

Mashas was teasing Tigre about the fact that he rushed in alone during the battle against Kreuger. Tigre, while playing it off as he rummaged his darkish red hair, expressed his gratitude to everyone.

The war council was over, and Gerard and Mashas left. Then, Valentina left.

Lim and Titta, who were silently waiting at a corner of the room until then, turned dubious eyes to Tigre who showed no signs of moving. They guessed that the youth seemingly intended to stay in the room and left the room together.

Only two people, Elen and Tigre remained in the room.

"What's the matter?"

Tigre fixedly stared at the face of Elen who revealed a carefree smile. But, he could not remain silent forever. He then began to talk.

"When the war with Sachstein is over, I intend to work in the royal palace."

Elen, not returning words immediately, fixedly stared at Tigre with a face

where her smile had disappeared. It was not expression saying that she was told something unexpected. It seemed to want to say that he'd finally touched on a subject that he would have to touch on sooner or later.

Tigre silently received her gaze which emitted a ruby-like brightness.

"I see....."

Elen muttered before long and made a bright smile as to shake something off.

"I should say "congratulations" here, but considering what happened yesterday, I guess it might be proper to say "good work". How many years do you intend to work in the royal palace?"

"I don't know yet. I don't intend to work for dozens of years, but..... I think I'll be in the royal palace for at least four or five years. I intend to return to Alsace during the summer or winter though."

It was not like Tigre thought of working in the royal palace expecting fame for himself and a gorgeous life in the royal court. Although Melisande, who was the greatest political opponent, was defeated, he did it in order to support Regin and Mashas who still had many enemies and also to protect Alsace by pushing Brune into peace.

Auguste's death also supported the youth's thoughts. This was because Tigre thought that when Regin's reign would become secure his (Auguste) brave fight would be rewarded.

Elen probably understood that. And because she understood, she had to try encouraging the youth with a smile at least. However, a sorrow that she was unable to conceal blurred into her smile and it looked like an ephemeral handicraft.

If Tigre was in Alsace, it wasn't like Elen and he wouldn't have any opportunities to meet. This was because when crossing the Vosyes Mountains, LeitMeritz was immediately before one's eyes.

But, the distance from Nice to LeitMeritz was too far.

Even if he returned to Alsace during the summer or winter, he would have to look around his territory as much as possible and do what he had to do. So,

even if Elen were to come to Alsace, she wondered whether he would be able to afford to entertain her.

“This may be the last time that we will fight side-by-side.”

“It won’t be the last time.”

Tigre denied it calmly, yet with a strong will.

“I said it before, didn’t I? That if you find yourself in a difficult situation, I will definitely rush over to you. It doesn’t matter if I’m in the capital, only that won’t change.”

Elen stared at Tigre with a surprised face, and looked downwards while pretending to smooth her hair upwards.

“Really, you.....”

Further words did not come out of the silver-haired Vanadis. Why has she forgotten? That the man whom she thought she wanted beside her was such a man.

“—By the way, while we’re at it is there something that you want to ask?”

As she played over various things with a joking way of speaking, Elen asked the youth with a smile.

“What about you? Don’t you have anything to ask me?”

When Tigre asked so while laughing, Elen slightly groaned with a “muh”.

“It’s unexpectedly difficult, eh. When it comes to you, I believe that I know most things, but.....”

“I answered ‘most things’ after all. By the way, though abrupt, may I ask you one thing?”

Elen gave a small nod at Tigre’s words.

“Elen, four years have passed since you became Vanadis, right?”

“Yes, it was when I was 14 years old after all.”

“Didn’t you feel anxious? To suddenly be in a position to govern a region.”

“How was it for you?”

Elen returned the question with a teasing smile.

“You, too, when you were 14, you inherited the title and Alsace from your father, right?”

“It wasn’t like there was no anxiety, but I had observed my father the feudal lord since I was a child, as well as my mother who supported my father. Lord Mashas gave me advice in various ways and there were also people who served since the time of my father, like Bertrand. Titta also encouraged me whenever possible.”

The time when he became a feudal lord, there was a time when Tigre was asked by Mashas whether he was all right, he answered “well, I’ll somehow get on with it”. It wasn’t like it was a groundless optimism, but it was his thanks to the many people who supported him, and a declaration of his intentions of moving forward.

Tigre thought that he was blessed.

“I want to make Alsace wealthier than now. I came to think so after I got used to living as a feudal lord. Until then, everyone patiently waited for me.”

“I see.”

Elen contently nodded several times. Then, she crossed her legs and looked up at the ceiling. But, her eyes seemed to be staring not at the ceiling, but something different.

“I also felt anxious when I became Vanadis. Speaking of a reliable person, there was only Lim after all. But, I had a dream of building a country. That’s why I was not at a loss. On that day when I’d arrived at the Imperial Palace of LeitMeritz, I gathered the civil and military officers and declared that.”

“That’s so like you. I’m sure that your subordinates were surprised, right?”

When Tigre laughed as he shrugged his shoulders, Elen also returned her gaze to the youth and sarcastically lifted the edge of her mouth.

“Yes. Any Vanadis seems to vaguely have the thought of wanting to govern a country in such a way, but it seems that it was the first time that one such as me did such a thing immediately after arriving at the Imperial Palace.”

“What kind of dream is it?”

“Where the people don’t starve, aren’t frightened that much by bandits and beasts, and can overcome freezing coldness; where the coming and going of people is prosperous and anyone can live while laughing. I want to build such a country.”

When Tigre asked, Elen fluently answered in a clear tone.

The youth opened wide his eyes. This was because he, when he became a feudal lord four years ago, did not have such a firm/proper thought.

Seeing Tigre’s reaction, the silver-haired Vanadis burst into laughter. She said while laughing happily.

“Actually, it’s not something that I thought of, myself. I took the exact same dream of a certain person.”

“A certain person.....?”

“Yes. —That’s right. I guess if it’s you, I don’t mind talking about it.”

Elen’s ruby-colored pupils glittered. While her eyes were turned to Tigre, they stared at something other than the youth.

“It’s a story from before I became Vanadis, when I was a mercenary.”

Silver Gale. It was the name of the mercenary group which Elen and Lim had belonged to.

“When I was a baby, I was picked up and raised by this mercenary group. It seemed that the village, where I was born, was attacked by bandits or mercenaries and was destroyed.”

Elen said a shocking thing in a smooth tone. Tigre was surprised, but he avoided speaking of his impression. Elen continued talking.

“The leader Vissarion was, in a few words, a strange man. His skill with the sword was reliable and he was brave when he stood on the battlefield. He didn’t make mistakes in his command and the mercenaries also deeply trusted him. The dream of such a leader was that he wanted to obtain his own country

someday.”

“His own country.....”

As expected, even Tigre opened wide his eyes. He almost uttered a surprised voice.

Such thing as a mere mercenary thinking of wanting to obtain his own country, unless it was not a joke he made due to alcohol, was too absurd.

“You think that it’s a joke, right?”

Seeing Tigre with a dumbfounded face, Elen slightly laughed. Looking at the ruby-colored pupils, Tigre immediately understood. Elen was talking seriously.

“That person said it seriously, huh.”

“Yes. It’s an extremely foolish and splendid dream.”

Narrowing her eyes as she talked about something nostalgic, Elen continued.

“I thought that if it was Vissarion, he could do it. I believed so. But — Vissarion died before obtaining his own country.”

The silence which fell in the room did not last long. Elen broke the silence in a voice full of drive.

“At that time, I decided, that I’ll try building a country.”

When nearly one year had passed after she decided so, Arifal appeared before Elen. The long sword, which was a Dragonic Tool, chose Elen as its master.

“I, who entered the Imperial Palace of LeitMeritz, gathered the civil and military officers and talked about everything that I was thinking of. And then I asked them, what I should do to realize it.”

Their reactions were largely favorable. The civil officials commented on it saying “it is a little too vague, eh” and the military officers laughed while joking “you are greedy, eh”.

But, they said that they would exert themselves in order to realize Elen’s ideal. Of course, Elen also worked hard so as to not betray their devotion and expectation; Lim supported her.

As she returned her gaze to Tigre, Elen said as to conclude the story.

“I imagined the shape of the country that I govern. For that, I gathered necessary human resources, fix the laws and built a suitable environment. Sometimes, I think of a new move. For me, that’s what it means to govern a country. Perhaps, it might be different from what Vissarion thought of, but I’m different from Vissarion. So I’ll do what I wish for.”

“Do what you wish for, huh.....”

“That’s what it means to be a ruler. Whether it be a feudal lord, or a Vanadis, or a King. —How’s that? Did it serve you a little as a reference?”

Tigre did not answer immediately. He strongly thought over Elen’s words carefully.

Before long, the youth nodded and stood up.

“Thank you.”

It did not only serve as a reference. Tigre was extremely happy. About the fact that Elen told him about her past and that she gave him a supportive push on the back.

She told him about how not only supporting Regin, but also imagining a country that you govern as a ruler. That might seem presumptuous, but Tigre was the feudal lord of Alsace. He was a ruler. He must not forget that viewpoint.

“Elen. It’s strange to say it now, but..... I’m glad I’d met you.”

Tigre said that with a thought flooded with emotions.

“You flatter me” Elen said while slightly laughing.

“First, it’s Sachstein. You understand that, right?”

“Yes” as he replied so, Tigre left Elen’s room.

Something warm reverberated inside his chest.

It might be the last war where they would fight side-by-side, Elen said so.

Precisely because she thought that their parting was near, she gave to him, the thing that was an important memory for her and would become the best

present.

He would not just trace (imitate) that dream, which she talked about, as is. He would find his own dream while relying on it. He would probably face that dream for many years.

And if he was able to accomplish that dream someday.

At that time, it would be without a doubt the greatest present for Elen.

Two days later, the Moonlight Knights army of 38,000 left the capital. The Vorn House's battle flag, which drew a white half-moon and a meteor on a blue background, and the Red Horse Flag were at the vanguard, followed by the noble feudal lords' battle flags and the Black Dragon Flag. It was a magnificent view.

Regin did not see them off. She had no room to do that as the cleaning up after the revolt has not yet been settled. But, during the short break that came into the audience room, she stood to the balcony at the back of the audience room and prayed to the gods for their safety.

Chapter 5 - Leonhardt of the Blitz

Leonhardt von Schmidt liked riding horses since he was a child.

The Schmidt House where he was born and raised had neither a high nor a low pedigree among the Sachstein nobles, but they had large grasslands in their territory and owned many horses.

However, there was almost no one excellent at horse riding in the Schmidt House. They mainly brought up horses in order to sell them to other nobles and knights.

But, Leonhardt was different.

Sachstein had more mountains and forests than plains, and probably because of that, it was said that Sachstein's horses, compared to other countries', had strong legs and loins. Leonhardt got on a horse, crossed the mountains, went through the forests and ran through the grasslands. He thought that as long as he was on horseback, he could go anywhere.

It might be said that it was an extremely natural course that he came to have an interest in the activities of the cavalrymen.

The Sachstein cavalries were by no means weak, but they didn't always raise brilliant war results, either. Especially, they had numerous hard fights against the neighboring country of Brune.

In a clash between fellow cavalries, the Brune Kingdom had a slight superiority. Even regarding the cavalry's numbers, Brune had more cavalry. It might be from these days that Leonhardt came to consider Brune as an enemy.

"I want to lead tens of thousands of cavalrymen someday. And then, I'll kick about Brune's cavalry."

It was not an innocent dream of a child. It was the goal that he decided he would realize by all means.

When he grew up, Leonhardt became a knight, and accumulated distinguished military services such as bandit extermination and reached the point where he could command one squad of cavalymen. And then, he confronted various problems that a cavalry has.

“Compared to infantry, cavalry takes money and time.”

Summarizing it in a few words, it came to look as such. It was the price of high mobility able to go for the tremendous charging power to kick about even a group of heavy armor infantrymen holding shields, and the enemy’s flank and rear.

First, there was water and food. The cavalry also had to prepare the horses’ shares. A horse ate food and drank water as much as or more than a human being. Even simply considering the portion for one human, food and water for 20 people would be necessary when moving a cavalry of ten horsemen.

They must take care of it. They had to wipe their horses’ bodies when they sweated, and by all means clean up after they took a dump. There were many stories of an army being exterminated because the horses’ poop, which they forgot to clean up during the march, was discovered by the enemy and they received a surprise attack after their position was pinpointed from there.

Moreover, there were also the expenses of horseshoes and saddles. One or two horses aside, when it came to 10 or 20 horses, the expenses were not to be sneezed at. In the case of horseshoes, craftsmen were necessary too.

“A battalion of cavalymen isn’t realistic.”

Such a conclusion would be made. It would be settled with a talk that organizing a squad of approximately 500 and using it at every important point would be more efficient.

However, Leonhardt did not give up.

“Each soldier should just learn to take care of a horse. Regarding the horseshoes, we’ll just collect craftsmen as cavalymen. What, we should just raise war results accordingly.”

Thus, Leonhardt, other than the salary given to him by the kingdom, also invested even his own assets and began with the training of his subordinates.

He made them learn how to read and write, to look after horses and drilled in them the way of fighting on horseback.

Leonhardt made his subordinates use clubs and maces rather spears. Long-handled weapons such as spears tended to be deemed suitable when wielding them on horseback, but it was a different story depending on a soldier's proficiency.

On a jolting horse, one grasped the reins with their left hand and wielded a weapon only with their right hand. There were many people who broke their balance as they swung a long-handled spear around. In addition, such people ended up injuring their horse with their weapon and obstructing their horse's view.

"I do not need to have all the knights and cavalymen hold a spear. It's just for a single blow from the horseback in addition to a charge. A weapon easy to rotate in hand will be enough."

In addition, Leonhardt selected an officer for each squad of 50 horsemen with 5 horsemen made up the smallest part of the unit and giving discretion authority to them. Confusion was easy to happen during the march for cavalymen, who moved not on their feet, but by riding horses. So, Leonhardt took measures so that they were able to move quickly even without his instructions.

But still, the problem of food and water stood in their way; but Leonhardt was not so troubled regarding this.

"We will march near rivers and lakes, and about food, we should just procure it locally."

It was not unusual for an army to attack and pillage towns and villages. It would become a problem after the war ended and moreover only in case that the allies lost. If they won, some injustices would be overlooked.

But, if he actively permitted pillaging, the leadership would relax and there was the fear of it resulting in the collapse of morals. Soldiers, who got drunk with cruel acts and ran wildly without listening to orders, could only be regarded as evils.

Therefore, Leonhardt enforced the method of the pillaging.

“It shall be done premeditatedly, systematically, effectively. Don’t kill the residents as much as possible, stop at just knocking about those who resist and have them deliver food and materials. Excluding the cases when there is an order, burn the houses and fields; and those who killed a resident will be sentenced to death without exception.”

Then, Leonhardt carried out what he said. He beheaded those who burnt the houses and those who killed a resident, and exposed their heads along the highway.

When he solved one problem, the next problem appeared. Leonhardt did not give up; he racked his brains and steadily overcame the problems one by one.

One time, Leonhardt had been summoned by the king of Sachstein, King August. The King, whose peculiarity was his stern, finely chiseled face, asked Leonhardt.

“Is it you? The one who thought about a unit of only cavalrymen.”

“It is not that small as to be called a unit.”

Leonhardt puffed up with pride and dignifiedly answered as such to the King.

“It is an army. I intend to someday run through grassy plains with tens of thousands of cavalrymen.”

The King did move one eyebrow to Leonhardt’s high-sounding words. It was a King known for not having laughed even when the Prince was born. As expected, even Leonhardt was daunted.

Not only that, but also the words uttered by the King after a pause surprised Leonhardt.

“Obey my orders for one year. If your cavalry can give satisfactory results, I will give you support to some extent.”

Leonhardt respectfully fell and prostrated and expressed words of gratitude. At this time, he did not believe August’s words. He had no hope towards the word, “support”.

But, he wanted to prove that his thoughts were correct and wanted to give

his cavalrymen, who grew little by little, a place to distinguish themselves.

For one year, Leonhardt and his cavalrymen literally rode about in Sachstein. They were roped into bandit extermination, dragged into skirmishes with Brune and Asvarre and made to go fight against feudal lords who arbitrarily moved their army.

The time of one year passed in a flash and Leonhardt was once again summoned by the King. August looked down at Leonhardt with an expression devoid of a smile as usual and shortly said.

“It is a promise. I shall support you. Make a powerful army useful for our country.”

Leonhardt fell and prostrated and swore him allegiance from the bottom of his heart.

Even if he received August’s support, it wasn’t like Leonhardt’s dream got closer to realization at a stretch. His dream needed time above all. However, as expected he was thankful for the King’s support.

He needed a time of more than twenty years before achieving all the tasks.

When he was appointed a General by the King, Leonhardt von Schmidt had turned 43 years old. His blond hair, which was lustrous when he was young, lost its luster and turned brass. The sharp tips of the mustache, which grew near his mouth, stretched on his cheeks and had a feeling of hardness.

He was currently the head of the Schmidt House, but he left the matters of the house to his 20-year-old son. The person himself (Leonhardt) let his blue eyes brighten energetically and completely devoted himself to the adjustment of the cavalry which he’d built.

Schmidt had the nickname of “Leonhardt of the Blitz^[22]”. The cavalrymen whom he commanded were said to be fast like lightning, and ferocious like thunder.

His army which accomplished the invasion into Brune ran around literally like lightning. The villages and towns which became targets of their pillaging were countless. Even in battle, they defeated the Brune troops five times. It was an outstanding distinguished military service for the Sachstein army.

Now, with their speed and ferocity, they were finally going to aim for the Capital Nice; but people who obstructed that appeared.

It was the Moonlight Knights army led by Tigrevurmud Vorn.

The Sachstein army's 50,000 cavalymen were in a place about 6 or 7 days on foot to the west from the capital Nice of the Brune Kingdom.

Schmidt, who received the reconnaissance unit's report of having discovered a large army, looked unenthusiastic when he had begun to hear it; but when he finished listening, both his eyes overflowed with fighting spirit. He shook his shoulders and revealed an extremely happy smile as he let his mustache wave.

As he made the soldier withdraw, Schmidt called his adjutant Birnbaum and ordered the entire army to take a rest. Then, he ordered him (adjutant) to prepare a map.

"Will we fight?"

Birnbaum, who turned 40 this year, shortly asked.

He was a man with an artless and somehow elusive atmosphere. Serving the Schmidt House from the time of their ancestors, Birnbaum was half forcibly made to help with the cavalry training by his young master whose age was close to his. Now, after Schmidt, he was the man who knew the most about the cavalry which Schmidt commanded.

To the question of his adjutant, who was a long time acquaintance, Schmidt immediately replied in a good mood.

"Of course. The enemy number is approximately 40,000. Moreover, in addition to the Black Dragon Flag of Zhcted, there's also a battle flag which draws a white half-moon and a meteor on a blue background. What is he called again, that man....."

"It's Tigrevurmud Vorn, right?"

"That's right!"

Schmidt gave a broad smile. But, he immediately returned to a serious expression.

"As expected, we can't ignore an enemy of 40,000. All the more, since we

have to take revenge for Kreuger.”

Schmidt knew that Kreuger was defeated by Tigre. This was because the Brune Kingdom was spreading it around enthusiastically.

“Your Excellency, I thought that you did not like General Kreuger very much though.”

Birnbaum threw such hazardous words to Schmidt without hesitation. He knew that his hazardous frankness was highly valued by Schmidt.

“If asked whether I liked or disliked him, then well, I’ll say I disliked him.”

Schmidt folded his thick arms and looked up at the blue sky.

“He was a commoner after all. I had talked several times with him, but we disagreed on everything except on the topic of war. But, it isn’t like I didn’t highly value his ability. His brilliant talent of building up a fortress is something that I don’t have. When I think about that, as expected I have to take revenge for him.”

“You are right.”

While giving the map to Schmidt, Birnbaum threw words of agreement. His supreme commander was currently endowed with anger, fighting spirit, and calmness altogether. It was enough if he could confirm only that.

They received this map as a gift from the woman called Melisande. Schmidt knew about the fact that she had died after failing in a revolt. This was because Brune spread it around like that time with Kreuger. But, Melisande’s death did not cause any strong feelings to/in Schmidt.

“Where do you think the battlefield will be?”

“It will probably be at Prowirl, right?”

Both men’s gazes concentrated on one point of the map. That place was a plain spreading in the south slightly away from the place where the scout party discovered the Brune army. When advancing through this plain to the east, several rivers intertwined with each other and became a flowing marshland. The marshland was an inconvenient place to deploy a battalion of cavalrymen.

“It’s quite pessimistic for an enemy who defeated Kreuger.”

“If the scout party’s report is correct, the enemy number is inferior to our troops’. Moreover, they have been encircled and defeated twice so far. I think that they are trying to avoid being encircled first.”

Birnbaum’s opinion was persuasive, and Schmidt accepted it by nodding.

“Very well. I’ll crushingly defeat them at Prowirl.”

After the break was over, Schmidt gave an order to the whole army.

The swarm of nearly 50,000 horses shook the earth and resumed their march.

It was a time still too early to call noon that the Moonlight Knights army and the Sachstein army confronted each other in the field of Prowirl. Although it was sunny, the sunlight was weak and more than the heat of the sun, the coolness of the wind could be felt on the skin.

The Moonlight Knights army took up position with the whole area thought to be the marshland at their back. They deployed about 20000 soldiers, whom the noble feudal lords led, and 2000 knights of the Knight Squadrons in the center, lined up the Zhcted army of 5000 to the right wing and 8000 Knight Squadron cavalymen to the left wing, and had 3000 soldiers standby to the rear as reserves troops.

Though the right wing had fewer soldiers than the left wing, it was the matched opinions of Tigre and Elen that it was better than poorly adding Brune soldiers there.

The Knight Squadrons of the center stood before the soldiers of the noble feudal lords. They anticipated that the enemy would probably charge after an arrow battle.

The Sachstein army also organized their forces to the center and right and left wings, but they were all cavalymen. Their formation was clear with a composition of 20000 in the center and respectively 10000 to the right and left.

In addition to this, there two detached forces are heading to the battlefield now. They each comprised of 5000 cavalymen and originally bore the role of showing up to the enemy’s rear and completing the encirclement. This time, it

was planned that they would unite with the Sachstein army's left and right wings respectively.

“As expected, there is a feeling of intimidation when tens of thousands of cavalymen line up before you.....”

At the center of the Moonlight Knights army, Tigre took a small breath. He felt like he understood that the soldiers were intimidated just by looking at the group of pitch black figures (horsemen) in the distance.

“Are you all right? Tigre.”

Mashas who was by his side anxiously called out to him. Tigre turned to look at the old Earl and revealed a smile to let him feel relieved. When he turned around to the front, that smile disappeared and his black pupils filled with fighting spirit firmly focused on the enemy.

Riding upon the winds, the sound of more than 100 horns echoed in the battlefield. The Sachstein army began to move. The White Eagle Flag (Hræsvelgr), which was floating overhead of them, intensely fluttered as to encourage the soldiers.

“Oh War God Tyulare, give us divine protection!”

“Oh War God Triglav, be witness to our battle!”

The Moonlight Knights army undauntedly raised their voices, too. It was fortunate for them that Brune and Zhcted believed in the same gods. The Red Horse Flag of Brune and the Black Dragon Flag of Zhcted fluttered as they were struck by wind.

Because the Moonlight Knights army did not move, only the Sachstein side advanced, shortening the distance. They held crossbows.

The Knights of Brune set up their long shields. These were made by sticking leather and an iron plate on a thick board. Only the Brune infantrymen numbering several hundreds and the Zhcted army of the left wing prepared bows and crossbows.

The distance between both armies shortened to less than 300 Alsins (about 300 m). The Sachstein army stopped their advance.

The strings of more than ten thousand crossbows and several hundreds of bowstrings shook all at once and made the atmosphere tremble. The bolts shot straight became silver lights, tore the wind and attacked the enemy. At the same time, several hundreds of arrows, which drew an arc in the sky, became a white rain pouring onto the Sachstein army.

The Brune knights blocked the bolts coming towards them with their long shields. It was the fighting style of Brune knights to block not just the bolts, but all kinds of projectile weapons with their long shields. There were also knights who failed to block them, receiving bolts on their shoulder or stomach and falling from their horses.

The Sachstein army also suffered some damage, but it wasn't to the extent that they got confused. The center forces threw away their crossbows, brandished swords and maces, raised war cries and kicked their horses' belly.

The Brune knights in the center of the Moonlight Knights army also reset their long shields, tightly grasped swords and spears and rode their horses. They had stepped forward before the infantrymen for this moment.

“Charge!”

Words of the same meaning collided in Sachstein's and Brune's languages. Horse hooves of extraordinary numbers shook the earth, kicked the grass around and rolled up clouds of dust.

Right in the middle of both armies, the White Steller's Sea Eagle and the Red Horse clashed. Weapons and weapons crossed; angry roars, shrieks, the sound of iron breaking and the sound of meat torn to pieces became harmonious and reached the ears of the soldiers of both armies. Death, destruction, fresh blood and pieces of meat were mercilessly scattered on the grassy plain.

Neither retreated; they swung their swords, struck their maces, thrust with their spears and tried to reduce the enemies in front of them even if by one. Those who fell from their horses were trampled on and crushed by enemies and their allies' horses as is.

Tigre and Mashas were surprised at this situation. This was because it was their plan to retreat luring the enemy after having charged once. They had to make the other soldiers and knights retreat before they let their fighting spirit

become highly strung and followed them^[23].

On the other hand, Schmidt made a complicated expression at the center of the Sachstein army. He also intended to make his side retreat and see the enemy's attitude. However, he was happy after seeing his subordinates' brave fight. It was only his adjutant Birnbaum who made a bitter face.

Horns were blown many times in both camps, and the Sachstein knights and Brune knights somehow managed to retreat before other forces/squads moved.

"I'm sorry. I misread their fighting spirit."

Tigre honestly admitted his own miscalculation and apologized to Mashas in a low voice. The Brune army had kept losing. He should have thought about the possibility that the knights would rouse themselves excessively. Mashas shook his head while stroking his gray beard.

"What, judging from that horn, it seemed to have been unexpected for the other side, too. It's not also like we're done one-sidedly and the battle has just begun."

While talking, both of them watched the enemy's state.

The Sachstein army turned their battle flag around and began to retreat with the whole army. But, it was far from being called orderly and indeed built an "I want to attack them" atmosphere. Moreover, they even spurted jeering in poor Brune language.

"It was also the same in the battle with General Kreuger, but..... they really have a sharp/nasty tongue, those Sachstein people."

As Tigre thought a little, he had the knights who fought a little while ago retreat to the rear and the infantry advance. He ordered the right and left wings to be on standby.

Seeing the Moonlight Knights army's movement, the Sachstein army stopped their retreat. Their side too did not move both their wings, and only the cavalry of the center advanced. The gazes of the vanguards of both armies, and then their weapons came in contact.

The Sachstein cavalymen swung down their swords and maces from

horseback. The Brune infantrymen either blocked them with their shields, or thrust with their spears from outside of the range of swords and maces.

The Sachstein soldiers, who were dragged down from horseback, piled on top of the Brune soldiers who fell down as they were sent flying by horses. In the places where it became a scuffle/ jostle, the Sachstein soldiers trampled down with their horses' hooves, or the Brune soldiers thrust them down with spears. No one knew who attacked who.

The horses neighed, people screamed, the smell of blood and the smell of iron were mixed and paralyzed their sense of smell. The fresh blood splashing around drew many dark red rainbows in the air.

Tigre, keeping his impetuosity in check, ordered the soldiers to retreat. He grasped the black bow which he hung on the saddle. He thought that he could jump into that place as just a archer.

But now, Tigre was the Moonlight Knights army's supreme commander, a position where he had to proceed calmly.

When the Moonlight Knights army retreated, the Sachstein army, which was lured in, advanced. But, as they seemed to have noticed that they were being lured, they stopped halfway and retreated. On the contrary, they retreated even further inviting the Brune army to stand out/stick out. Of course, Tigre did not take the bait and orderly had the soldiers retreat.

---Now, it's a contest of endurance.

He wondered how Schmidt would judge the Brune army's movement.

It was then that a change occurred in the Sachstein army's movement. The troops of both wings that were on standby until then greatly deployed/spread out sideways while advancing. If looking down from the sky, one would have the impression of a Steller's sea eagle seeming to have spread its wings.

Under Tigre pressing the area of his chest in strain, two horse bound messengers showed up. They were messengers from the Zhcted army of the right wing and the Knight Squadrons of the left wing respectively. They reported that the enemy's detached forces which appeared from outside of the battlefield joined respectively the right wing and the left wing and the enemy's

thickness increased at a stretch.

---So, he moves his detached forces like that after all.

Since the Brune army had the marshland at their back, the Sachstein army could not sneak around to the Moonlight Knights army's back. No, they did not need to sneak around. This was because they just had to encircle the Moonlight Knights army by utilizing the marshland.

For the Moonlight Knights army, the marshland was a defensive wall protecting their back, but it was also an obstacle which did not allow their retreat. As for the Sachstein army, they should just corner the enemy from the three directions of front, right and left; and they were just doing as such right now.

The Sachstein army's wings stuck out and went around the Moonlight Knights army.

The Zhcted army and the Knights Squadrons attacked so as to not allow it, but the Sachstein army's movement was skillful. While they made a wall with several units and blocked the Moonlight Knights army's attack, other units rode their horses and hurried the completion of the encirclement.

The sun was close to the zenith when the Sachstein army surrounded the Moonlight Knights army from the three directions.

Tigre inhaled a small breath, exchanged looks with Mashas and ordered the whole army.

"Retreat."

The Moonlight Knights army set foot in the marshland spreading at their back. Though they should've quickly lost their footing on the soft soil and their movement should've become dull, it did not happen.

The Moonlight Knights army continued to retreat orderly and escaped from the Sachstein army's encirclement. Moreover, just like the enemy, they took a formation, spreading out right and left.

Although Schmidt, who was the Sachstein army's supreme commander, frankly revealed a surprised expression, it was just for an instant and he

immediately regained his fearless smile.

“Since they had the marshland at their back, I thought that they took some kind of measures, but.....”

Schmidt guessed that they had probably spread thick board-like things in the marshland and camouflaged it by putting earth on top of them. This was because Schmidt himself had used such a way in order to quickly pass through quagmires and snowy fields with cavalry.

“Your Excellency. At this rate, both wings which are spread out will be in danger.”

Birnbaum indifferently warned. At that time, both wings of the Sachstein army were already receiving attacks of the Moonlight Knights army.

Until they were surrounded by the enemy a little while ago, both the Zhcted army and the Knight Squadrons have been ordered to standby. Even the attack in order to try escaping from the enemy’s encirclement was no more than a pretense.

But, the opportunity for the counterattack finally came to their side.

“I kept you waiting! Charge!”

Standing at the vanguard of the Zhcted army, Elen resolutely cried while brandishing Arifal. She blew about the bolts shot by the enemies’ crossbows with the power of wind, fiercely rode her horse and jumped into the Sachstein army’s left wing.

Cries in the Sachstein language surrounded Elen, and swords, maces and clubs attacked her. As she revealed a smile filled with fighting spirit, Elen swung her long sword as she let her silver hair flutter in the wind.

The first enemy had the arm holding his sword cut down and he fell from his horse, the next enemy had his head bisected as he had a posture where he raised his club.

Elen dodged the mace which the third enemy let out by slightly bending her body. She struck a return blow to the throat of the Sachstein soldier. The Sachstein soldier died as he scattered fresh blood.

The Zhcted soldiers too, who jumped into the enemy territory following Elen, literally showed the ability of a raging lion. Rurick successively shot down those thought to be the enemy's commanding officers with his bow, and Lim also cut down the Sachstein soldiers one after another.

Valentina had her soldiers surrounding her and did not fight herself, but the Osterode soldiers showed a way of fighting not at all inferior to LeitMeritz's soldiers. They always acted in groups of three, and thrust with their spears from multiple directions aimed at a Sachstein soldier on horseback.

The Sachstein army's left wing numbered 15000 after adding the detached force which joined later. Although it became long and narrow vertically after they had spread out, they were overwhelmed by only 5000 Zhcted troops.

But, the Zhcted army's fierce attack did not continued any further. A group of Sachstein cavalymen, who suddenly appeared, attacked the Zhcted army's flank. As they charged taking advantage of the momentum, the Zhcted army's movement stopped as they received an unexpected counterattack.

"Was there still a detached force.....?"

While cutting down the enemy before her, Elen gave a small groan. "No, that's not it" she immediately realized. They had probably made a detached unit with either the central forces or the cavalymen who were behind the left wing.

"Still, their reaction is quick. Should I say as one would expect of a General of Sachstein?"

Elen did not panic. She gave up attacking any further and gathered the soldiers with Lim. They moved to retreat. Valentina too moved like her and orderly retreated.

A similar situation was also happening to the Sachstein army's right wing. Attacking on that side were the various Knight Squadrons of Brune. The knights of Brune carried out a charge from the front.

"Charge! Make those Sachstein rats regret having come here!"

Scheie of the Lutece Knight Squadron shouted standing at the vanguard. A fierce charge as to make one wonder whether the grassy plain wouldn't turn

into a wasteland made the Sachstein army flinch.

When allowed to charge on flat ground, Brune's Knight Squadrons displayed a tremendous power. The Sachstein army either shot bolts from crossbows, or huddled together and tried to defend themselves with shields; but they were not able to stop Brune's Knights.

The long spears which were thrust even pierced through the back of the Sachstein soldiers and their horses toppled sideways unable to endure the force. The Sachstein soldiers were by no means weak, but they were out pushed in spirit. As the humiliation of the defeats so far was struck on them (by the Brune army) at a stretch, the Sachstein army's right wing had already begun to fall.

However, it did not completely fall apart. This was because Brune's knights stopped attacking as they were exposed to an intense attack from the left side. It was a Sachstein cavalry squad who attacked them.

"No good! Retreat here!"

At this rate, they would end up receiving the enemy's attack from the front and the left side. Scheie who judged so loudly shouted while knocking down with his spear the Sachstein cavalymen coming slashing at him.

Though they weren't as prompt as the Zhcted army, even so Brune's knights retreated little by little. They had to prepare for considerable sacrifices in order to completely pull apart from the Sachstein army.

"—Hmm. I guess I should have attracted them a little more."

While issuing instructions at the rear of the Sachstein army's central forces, Schmidt flipped his mustache with a hard feeling. The detached forces, which attacked the Zhcted army and Brune's Knight Squadrons, were the ones that Schmidt organized after cutting some cavalry from the central forces.

What was surprising was probably the speed in which the detached forces were organized after he'd issued the instructions. Schmidt was able to prepare a detached unit in a time less than half of the time that an ordinary army would need. It was also for that reason that Elen and Scheie were about to mistake the

timing of their retreat.

Though, Schmidt's attitude too did not have that much composure. Although they succeeded in counterattacking and made the enemy withdraw, it was the Sachstein army which had been caught in a trap in the first place.

"They put the marshland at their back..... No, they had two aims for pretending it to be as such, huh. As expected of a hero. He's not bad, eh."

He made the Sachstein army give up the way they fought so far by aiming for the enemy's encirclement (strategy), and on top of that, let the Moonlight Knights army attack in the form they wanted. And Schmidt was made to ride on Tigre's plan.

"—Birnbaum. Attack with all the cavalrymen the center."

Though he was lost in thought for a while, Schmidt told as such in a quite plain tone.

"But, I don't think that the traps that guy has set has run out. Therefore....."

Birnbaum nodded after receiving the order of the dull blond-haired supreme commander. Judging from only his expression, it was hard to discern whether he understood it or not. But, he has never once gone against Schmidt's order until now.

It could clearly be seen even from where Tigre was that the 20,000 horsemen of the Sachstein army's central forces had started moving. As they rolled up a cloud of dust and raised battle cries, the image of 20,000 cavalrymen marching just like surging waves could only be described as a masterpiece.

Tigre, while inwardly restraining his tension, calmly stared at the enemy on horseback and turned to look at Mashas with a composed expression. He had the soldiers make the preparations for a certain thing.

---How far will this work.....?

The flexibility of Schmidt's cavalry use was far out of Tigre's reach. It would probably be difficult even for Elen and the people of the Knight Squadrons.

The flag of the white eagle fluttered. The flood of men and horses and iron

which raged attacked the Moonlight Knights army as to swallow them in one gulp.

Tigre nocked an arrow to his black bow and drew it. The tip of the arrow was wrapped in fire.

It was not only Tigre. All the people with a bow and arrows in the Moonlight Knights army such as Mashas' son Gaspar, prepared fire arrows and set them up. Besides, there were also people who wetted the tip of their javelin with oil and set fire on it. These were what he asked Mashas to prepare a while ago.

“Shoot!”

Mashas shouted. With that as the signal, dozens of fire arrows were shot into the sky. Scattering countless sparks in the empty sky, the fire arrows drew an arc and came down, overhead of the Sachstein army. Moreover, dozens of javelins which wore fire attacked the Sachstein army.

Most fire arrows and javelins were brushed away by the Sachstein army, but even so several of them stuck into the ground. Immediately after, flames gushed out of under the feet of the Sachstein army.

The horses screamed, drowning out the surprised voices of the humans. Either they acted violently and collided with their comrades, or they reared up and threw off their rider onto the ground.

Even the humans could not stay calm. There were people who unintentionally pulled their reins and collided with the comrades following after them. There were also those who fell from their horses and writhed within a sea of flames.

When the leading group completely stopped their advance, the people following after them either abruptly stopped their horses, or couldn't help but be rolled up. Those who toppled sideways without their horses stopping and those, who spread the damage as they rolled up other people further, appeared one after another. The Sachstein army's charge completely stopped.

Though there were also people among them that ran through the raging flames and approached the Moonlight Knights army, they were not a menace if not gathered. Spears were thrust from many directions and the men and horses fell together to the ground.

Tigre had spread out thick boards on the marshland. It was just as Schmidt had thought.

But, Tigre fully let oil soak into these boards. There was also the calculation not to let it spread more than necessary if the surroundings were the marshland.

The Moonlight Knights army attacked the Sachstein army taking this opportunity. They slashed at them with swords, thrust at them with spears, drove them in within the flames. The Sachstein army in confusion was unable to counterattack and they fell down one after another within the raging flames.

At the rear of the Sachstein army, Schmidt calmly gazed at the battlefield. Since he was to the rear with Birnbaum, he did not fall prey to Tigre's trap.

Then, he gave new instructions to his adjutant.

"Don't think that surrounding and fighting is the only way of fighting that my cavalymen are capable of. Tigrevurmud Vorn"

On the other hand, Tigre divided the central forces, which he himself commanded, into the left and right. He intended to make them detour around the flames and defeat the Sachstein army.

But before they carried that out, the Moonlight Knights army encountered an unexpected counterattack.

A detached force of the Sachstein army fiercely attacked the Knight Squadrons which were in the left wing. The Sachstein cavalymen's swords and maces cut down their shoulders, smashed their helmets and knocked them down one after another in a pool of blood.

This detached force wasn't the only one; with the path after the first unit immediately retreated after attacking the Knight Squadrons, the next unit cut in immediately after the first one retreated, the Knight Squadrons were not given any room to rebuild their formation, let alone counterattack. They were forced to retreat and saw their numbers rapidly decrease.

Tigre, who received the report from a messenger, hurriedly stopped the

attack by the central main forces. He realized Schmidt's aim.

---So, he intends to crush the Knight Squadrons and make the left side of the central main forces, which I lead, defenseless, huh.

Moreover, he probably intended to make our central main forces collapse by attacking it from the front and the left side.

Tigre could not help but shiver. Not only to Schmidt's thoughts, but also to his ability of being able to do that in this situation. He certainly operated his cavalry units like his hands and feet. If he felt like it, there was no doubt that he would be able to organize several hundreds or several thousands of units in a very little time.

Speaking strictly of command of cavalry, Schmidt would be superior to Muozinel's King's younger brother, Kreshu Shaheen Baramir.

And Tigre had to defeat such a man.

---We must absolutely win in this battle.

He was a man able to pull off anything such as encirclements, surprise attacks or even attack in waves. And at an amazing speed at that. Even if Tigre and company were able to win this battle, he was not an opponent they should fight once again.

For the time being, Tigre had the reserves forces of the rear head to the Knight Squadrons' aid. He pondered about something while letting fatigue spread on his face.

---Elen.....

He was reminded of the silver-haired Vanadis' smile. At the time when Tigre said that he would work in the capital, she hid her sad face and gave him her blessing while laughing. He apologized for having relied on her and making her jump into the line of death.

Tigre turned to Mashas and consulted him about what he thought. Before long, messengers ran from the central main forces to the Zhcted army of the right wing and the Knight Squadrons of the left wing respectively.

At the center of the Sachstein army, Schmidt and Birnbaum were watching

the battle progress.

---Looks like it'll be over without me using my army's trump card.

Schmidt muttered without voicing it out.

That trump card was not something which Schmidt thought of. It was something that King August had prepared in secret.

4000 horsemen from Sachstein's detached forces once again went through the sea of flames and attacked the Moonlight Knights army's left wing.

"Retreat!"

Tigre shouted. The Knight Squadrons retreated, and the left side of the central forces became exposed. Furthermore, Tigre adjusted the central forces' battle formation.

When looking from the sky, a part of the Moonlight Knights army's central forces seemed to have been greatly dented. The Sachstein army's detached forces got in there. This was a mistake for them. When the Moonlight Knights army dragged in these detached forces as is, they surrounded and attacked them from three directions.

As they were either attacked with swords, struck with spears from the front, right and left, or their horses were injured, the Sachstein army's detached forces saw its numbers decrease at an amazing speed. They turned their horses and began to flee as they could not endure it. The Moonlight Knights army did not block up their path of retreat, nor did they chase them.

Lined up to the flank of them, who returned after running away from the main forces, was the Zhcted army — LeitMeritz's cavalymen led by Elen that stuck out from the right wing.

"We'll jump into the enemy as is!"

Elen brandished Arifal and shouted. At the same time, the central forces led by Tigre and the left wing's forces led by the Knight Squadrons advanced fiercely in order to support Elen.

Schmidt and Birnbaum who commanded the Sachstein army were surprised.

"I didn't think he would come up with such a way/method....."

Schmidt groaned as hot sweat moistened his hair and mustache. Faster than he could issue instructions for interception, LeitMeritz's cavalymen engaged the Sachstein army's central forces. Because he had built many detached forces, it was a misfortune that the central forces' battle formation lost its thickness.

Every time when Elen swung her long sword, bloody wind violently blew and the Sachstein soldiers fell down as they became silent corpses. It seems like neither a sword nor a mace nor could anything, which could injure her, reach at all. Her silver hair glittered as it bathed in the feeble sunlight, and the silver blade she held in her hand also emitted dull brightness.

"Your Excellency, please escape."

Schmidt shook his head to Birnbaum's words.

"These cavalymen are as good as my body. Are you asking me to abandon my body and escape?"

In the meantime, Elen swung Arifal and literally cut her way through the enemy and approached Schmidt. Though Schmidt was also confident in his military prowess, he understood he could not match Elen after witnessing her way of fighting.

"Kreuger wrote about it in the letter, but..... She is indeed a war goddess."

At that time, the battle reached a new change. A little less than 10,000 figures of horsemen appeared in the rear of the Moonlight Knights army. Tigre thought that it was a detached unit of the Sachstein army, but he held his breath to the report of the messenger.

"They are..... They are floating the battle flag of a Red Dragon!"

Red Dragon. It was Asvarre.

"Asvarre.....?"

Tigre and even Mashas could not react at once. It was that much of a shock.

The Asvarre army ran up the marshland without minding their ranks breaking and moved to the Moonlight Knights army's right wing's rear. It wasn't like they didn't set an attack, and though there's also an opened distance of about 300 Alsins (about 300 meters), the unrest that the Moonlight Knights army received

was intense.

In the worst case, they would be taken into a pincer attack between the Sachstein army and the Asvarre army.

Elen had no choice but to give up on her attack. Without the support of the central forces led by Tigre, the LeitMeritz army would be left behind in enemy territory. The silver-haired Vanadis was a commander and had a responsibility towards the soldiers following her.

“Retreat!”

She turned her horse and once again swung her long sword while roughly breathing. Schmidt who saw her figure issued instructions to Birnbaum and opened a path of retreat for the LeitMeritz army.

“We’ll withdraw, too. Today’s battle is already over.”

While playing with his mustache as he frowned, Schmidt told so to Birnbaum. The trump card — which was in the form of relying on the Asvarre army was extremely unpleasant for him.

Floating the flag of the white eagle, the Sachstein army swiftly retreated at a surprising speed.

The Moonlight Knights army, as they were dumbfounded, could only see them off; and speaking of the Asvarre army, they reformed their ranks and left as though to say that they were done here.

The first day of the battle of Prowirl closed its curtain like this. The Moonlight Knights army’s casualties exceeded 4000 and the Sachstein army’s casualties numbered 6000.



On a grassy plain 500 Alsins away from the field of Prowirl, the Moonlight Knights army set up their camp.

Five people, Tigre, Mashas, Elen, Lim and Valentina gathered in the tent for the supreme commander. There were baked sweets and wine for the number

of people in front of them. It was something that Titta had prepared.

The five people's topic focused on the Asvarre army.

"Sachstein is really careful. To think that they didn't just join forces with Melisande, divide in two and attack from the west and south, but they even prepared an ally which is Asvarre, too."

When Elen said so in an impressed voice, Mashas stroke his gray beard in displeasure.

"Asvarre's aim is probably the northern territories. It doesn't conflict with Sachstein's aim. Still, it worries me that long-standing mortal enemies came to cooperate so well."

Sachstein often caused skirmishes with Brune, but they also frequently set small-scaled wars with Asvarre.

All the more, the fact that Asvarre became an ally of Sachstein gave a great shock to the Brune army. Before coming into this tent, Mashas met with the noble feudal lords and people of the Knight Squadrons and had to eagerly soothe them who were confused and anxious.

"So Earl Vorn, what do you intend to do?"

While picking up a baked sweet, Valentina asked with a smile as if to say it had nothing to do with her.

"Strictly speaking, with this it has become a two versus two, but..... just the Asvarre army alone has 10,000 cavalrymen. And it's not like we gave a heavy blow to the Sachstein army, so I can't help but say that it's a disadvantageous situation."

"Is that sarcasm?"

Elen glared at the black-haired Vanadis with eyes tinged with hostility. "No", Valentina shook her head as she denied with a smile. As Tigre gulped down wine with a difficult expression, he turned his gaze to Lim.

"How about it? Do you have any plans, Lim?"

"It is not to the extent of being called a plan though."

While biting a small portion of a baked sweet, Lim answered.

“I am concerned about the fact that the enemy did not take us in a pincer attack. Considering the Sachstein army, this may be because the threat called Eleonora-sama came close, but.....”

When Tigre nodded, he moved his gaze to the baked sweets put on the plate. That was certainly strange. The Asvarre army just showed their figures and didn't try to attack us, and the Sachstein army too had retreated quickly, after Elen had retreated.

Even if the Asvarre army did not move, if the Sachstein army had held their ground as is and continued fighting, the battle's situation might have changed again.

---Does this mean that there isn't a relationship of mutual trust between both parties?

As Mashas had said, Sachstein and Asvarre were mortal enemies. If he wondered about whether the enemy did not match their (Brune side) movement, he could understand their actions.

“—I'll try contacting the Asvarre army.”

Looking around at all the members, Tigre said.

“I don't know who their commander is; but if it's a person I know, there might be room for negotiations.”

Saying so, Tigre told the four people about how he got involved with Asvarre's civil war. Though he has already told Elen, Lim and Mashas about it, one might say that it was an explanation for Valentina.

“If we can hold back/stop the Asvarre army by negotiations, I will certainly be thankful, but.....”

Elen frowned and folded her arms as she lost herself in thought.

“The personnel selection is difficult. In case they don't intend to negotiate with Asvarre, the sent emissary will without doubt be sent to the Sachstein army as materials for diplomacy.”

Not anybody could be a messenger. Unless it was someone of a suitable

position, it would be treated as rudeness towards the other party. Should that happen, the person becoming the messenger, in the worst case, must prepare himself for not coming back alive. Tigre gave a small groan.

“If you don’t mind, shall I go?”

It was Lim who suggested as such in her usual indifferent tone. Tigre and Elen stared wide-eyed and were about to spin words of objection. But, earlier than that, a voice of agreement was raised.

“That’s right. If it is Limalisha-dono, I think that she is suitable as the messenger.”

Elen spontaneously glared at Valentina. Warding off her gaze filled with hostility with a smile, Valentina continued.

“She has a deep friendship not only with Earl Vorn, but also Earl Rodant. She will be the most suitable to show the friendship between our country and Brune. Besides, Asvarre should not want to make an enemy out of our country. I do not think that they will give her a rough treatment.”

“I’m against it.”

Tigre shook his head saying so in a peremptory tone.

“If anything were to happen to Lim — Limalisha, Brune will lose the LeitMeritz army’s trust.”

Valentina gave no answer towards that and turned her gaze to Lim. As Lim slightly shook her golden hair tied on the left side of her head, she calmly nodded.

“Eleonora-sama. I will go to the Asvarre army as the messenger.”

“Wait. This is Brune’s war. So it’ll be logical to let a person from Brune go.”

Tigre restrained Lim as he said so, but she did not nod her head. As she moved her gaze to Tigre, Lim revealed a smile on her lips.

“It is not a definite fact that I will definitely die. Besides, I think that compared with a person from Brune, the possibility of a person from Zhcted not ending up killed is certainly high.”

It did not seem like she intended to change her opinion. Tigre turned a gaze mixed with irritation towards Elen. He appealed to her to stop Lim without voicing it out. The silver-haired Vanadis, who kept silent until then, turned her pupils of ruby-colored brightness to her adjutant who was also her close friend.

“—Is it fine to leave it to you?”

After a short pause, she asked in a tone tinged with strictness. Lim nodded, and Tigre stared at Elen with a dumbfounded face. The Wind Princess of the Silver flash deliberately avoided making eye contact with the youth and looked at Mashas.

“Lord Mashas. We’ll send Lim as the messenger. Lend me your help.”

“I understand.”

The gray-bearded veteran briefly replied. Then, he lightly tapped Tigre’s shoulder.

“Somebody has to go. I too think that Limalisha-dono is a good choice.”

Being said so up to there, Tigre also couldn’t help but answered that he understood. Now that it turned out like this, what the youth could do was only praying to the gods for Lim’s safety.

It was about when the sun went down that Lim left the Moonlight Knights army’s camp, but she did not come back even when night wore on. It did not even take half a koku to go on horse to the Asvarre army’s camp.

Tigre persuaded himself thinking “maybe the negotiations dragged on”, but as expected he was impatient. He wondered whether he should have let her go after all.

Inside the tent for the supreme commander, there were only Tigre and Elen. Mashas and Valentina should be sleeping respectively in their tent. Tigre and Elen also understood that they must also rest their bodies, but even so they were unable to sleep as their nerves were highly strung.

At first, they’d exchanged a trifling conversation in order to kill time, but now both of them hardly moved as they were in a posture where they sat down on

the carpet; and it was to the extent that they only drank wine that Titta had put when they felt thirsty.

The light of the lamp suspended from the ceiling unreliably illuminated inside the tent.

When the moon approached its zenith, they noticed footsteps approaching from outside of the tent; both of them abruptly raised their faces. After a little while, the soldier who stood on guard called out to them from outside.

“Your Excellency Supreme Commander, I am sorry to disturb you as you are resting. May you get up?”

“What happened?”

Did Lim come back? While harboring such an expectation, Tigre asked as he controlled his voice. But, the soldier’s reply was slightly off from the youth’s wish.

“Someone calling himself the messenger of Asvarre has shown up and wants to speak with your Excellency.”

Tigre unintentionally exchanged looks with Elen. With a tense countenance, the youth addressed the guard.

“Understood. Bring him here.”

And then before long, one man entered the tent. He was in his mid-twenties. He’d wrapped his body in a gray overcoat and revealed a friendly smile. He respectfully bowed to Tigre and gave his name and position.

Tigre leaned his black bow against the wall of the tent, stood up and greeted him.

By the way, Elen stayed seated on the carpet as is. Without naming herself, she was observing the messenger. Although she kept her hand away from Arifal, if she felt like it, she could grab the scabbard and handle, unsheathed the sword and cut down the messenger in an instant.

“Did you meet the messenger whom I sent to you people?”

While urging the messenger to sit down, Tigre casually asked about Lim. It must not be perceived that he was worried about her. Sure enough, the

messenger answered with a smile.

“Yes. It is Limalisha-dono of the Zhcted army, right? It is precisely because I was told the location of the Moonlight Knights army’s camp by her that I was able to come like this without losing my way.”

“Glad to hear it. By the way, who is your supreme commander?”

The messenger answered with a smile as though to say that he was waiting for that question.

“With all due respect, does your Excellency Earl remember the name of Tallard Graham?”

While being careful so as to not reveal his inward surprise on his face, Tigre composedly nodded. “I thought so”, he’d also had such a thought.

“Of course. After all, not even half a year has passed since I parted with him. I was in his care when I was in Asvarre.”

One might say that the latter half of his lines was lip service. It was in last year’s autumn that Tigre intervened in Asvarre’s civil war. The civil war was over before winter, and Tigre left Asvarre with Sofy and company.

In a country where a civil war had just ended, Tallard’s ability of preparing an army in a little less than half a year and performing a foreign campaign might be said to be frightening.

“I am grateful. Well then, I shall convey the demand of our lord. Duke Graham wishes to meet your Excellency Earl Vorn with only the two of you.”

“Duke Graham.....?”

More than the contents of the words, that part caught Tigre’s attention and he cocked his head in puzzlement. The messenger answered as if it was nothing.

“Lord Graham was granted the rank of Duke for the achievement from supporting Princess Guinevere.”

Not only Tigre, but also Elen opened her eyes wide at this. She also had heard about the events in Asvarre from Tigre. Tallard Graham was born a commoner and he shouldn’t have had that high a rank before the civil war occurred.

---And now he's a Duke.....

Tigre held his breath. He could not help recalling the exchange with Regin before leaving Nice. However, the youth immediately pulled himself together and said to the messenger with a smile.

"I see. Tell Lord Tallard my congratulations."

To Tigre's words, the messenger exaggeratedly bowed his head and expressed words of gratitude.

Then, the messenger told some conditions for the occasion when Tallard and Tigre would meet.

That both parties not move their camp and army.

That Brune's side decides the meeting place and Asvarre's side decides the time of the meeting.

That from the Moonlight Knights army, only Tigre alone came. And from their side too, Tallard who was the supreme commander would also come alone.

When she heard the third condition, Elen frowned. Tigre going alone was too dangerous. If Tallard was to deceive them and bring soldiers along, the battle's outcome would be decided at that moment. By the Moonlight Knights army's defeat, that is.

"Are you saying that Lord Tallard will come without bringing even one escort along?"

To Elen's question, the messenger immediately replied without changing his complexion one bit.

"His Excellency deeply trusts Earl Vorn. Besides, if he was to move accompanied by a group of attendants, there is the fear of being found by the Sachstein army."

"—I understand."

After a short pause, Tigre opened his mouth. Though Elen revealed a surprised face, Tigre asked the messenger without looking at her.

"By the way, does Lord Tallard like wine from Brune?"

To the unexpected question, the messenger revealed a puzzled expression. But, he smile afterwards and answered.

“Yes. His Excellency likes alcohol from neighboring countries, but he seems to particularly appreciate the ones from Brune.”

“I see. Then, I shall bring one bottle with me. Since we’re in such a place, it’s impossible for me to bring the finest one though. Can I ask you to tell Lord Tallard to prepare the cups?”

Again, the messenger was unable to answer immediately. He could not guess Tigre’s true intentions. But, he immediately revealed a smile and respectfully bowed. He promised to convey it to Tallard.

“By the way, is our messenger at your place?”

As the negotiations were over, Tigre asked while pretending to be indifferent. He thought that if the other party was Tallard, he would not carelessly hurt Lim.

But, he could not feel relieved. This was a battlefield, and Tigre and Tallard pointed their blades at each other. No one knew what would become the trigger to change this situation.

“Yes. Duke Graham was very pleased with Limalisha-dono.”

Tigre, who heard the messenger’s reply, unconsciously knitted his brows. He could not guess at all what kind of conversation Tallard and Lim exchanged.

The meeting place was settled to be at a hill ahead when walking about 2 Belsta (about 2 km) to the north from the place where the Moonlight Knights army and the Asvarre were facing each other.

Although dawn broke, Tigre went to the hill on horseback alone as promised when the sky was still dim.

Before leaving the camp, the youth naturally encountered strong opposition from the surroundings. Elen looked at the youth with a depressed face, and Mashas, Gaspar, Rurick and Gerard, who were told about it later, were all against it. Only Valentina did not object.

“Do you approve of it?”

Being asked so by Elen, the black-haired Vanadis answered as follows.

“I have never met that Tallard Graham. It is the same for you too, right, Eleonora? Then, isn’t it natural to leave it to the person who has already met him?”

“If anything happens, Tigre will die, you know?”

“Eleonora. Our duty is to help him, right?”

“That’s right. In other words, at times when he makes a wrong decision, we should make him understand it even if we have to hit him.”

“I do not think so. This is Lord Tigrevurmud’s war. If there is a chance of success, we should refrain from excessive interference. Above all, we are foreigners after all.”

When being told so, Elen could not strongly argue against that, too. When examining it^[24] as the Princess of LeitMeritz, Elen helped Tigre too much.

Of course, Elen also had her point. For LeitMeritz which shared a border with Brune, she would be troubled unless Brune became stable moderately.

“I got it. Here, I’ll do as you say.”

It was certain that they had to do something about Asvarre. Though Tigre said that he would be all right, she was also worried about Lim’s well-being. And, she also had to keep a lookout on Valentina so that she didn’t do anything unnecessary.

Seen off by Elen and company, Tigre advanced his horse to the designated place. If he went straight, it would not take a quarter koku, but he had to take a detour in order to avoid the Sachstein army’s eyes.

When nearly half a koku had passed, the hill of the meeting could be seen. It was a small hill and except for the fact that trees grew there sparsely, it was covered with short grass and was dyed with greenery.

Where Tallard was waiting was not at the top, but at a slope which went down by approximately ten steps from the top. This was also chosen after considering this place to be hard to be found by the Sachstein army’s reconnaissance units.

He went down from his horse, hung a basket, which wine was put in, to his

left hand and went up the hill while pulling the reins with his right hand. Before long, Tigre found the figures of a man and a woman near a tree which grew diagonally. They were Tallard and Lim.

Tallard was in his mid-twenties. He had a medium build, and his short blond hair and transparent blue eyes did not change from before. No, the ambition floating in his eyes increased from before and seemed to strongly shine.

His suntanned face was tightened sharply and dignified, and the silver armor wore on top of his blue silk clothes suited him well.

Lim was still the same as when she left the camp as the messenger. As there was no sign that she received any external wounds, Tigre heaved a sigh of relief and smiled at her. Then, he turned to Tallard.

“It’s been a while.”

The blond-haired Duke revealed a carefree smile and held out his hand to Tigre. Being lured in by that, Tigre unintentionally laughed, too. Tigre asked him in a joking tone.

“I’m thankful to you for having accommodated our messenger overnight, but you didn’t do anything strange, did you?”

“About that, Lord Tigrevurmud.”

Lim butted in from the side. Slight fatigue blurred in her voice

“I was certainly together with Lord Tallard overnight, but we spent the night talking about you.”

To these unexpected words, Tigre looked at Lim’s and Tallard’s faces alternately with a perplexed face. Tallard revealed a mischievous smile.

“Because at the time of the civil war, you quickly went back to Zhcted with the beautiful Vanadises, we weren’t able to talk at all. It seems that after becoming Lady Eleonora’s prisoner, you spend a really eventful life, eh. I should have asked about it earlier.”

Tigre rummaged his darkish red hair with a face showing he didn’t know what to say. He looked at Lim and said “thank you for your hard work” with a wry smile. He could not voice out any other words than that. When Lim bashfully

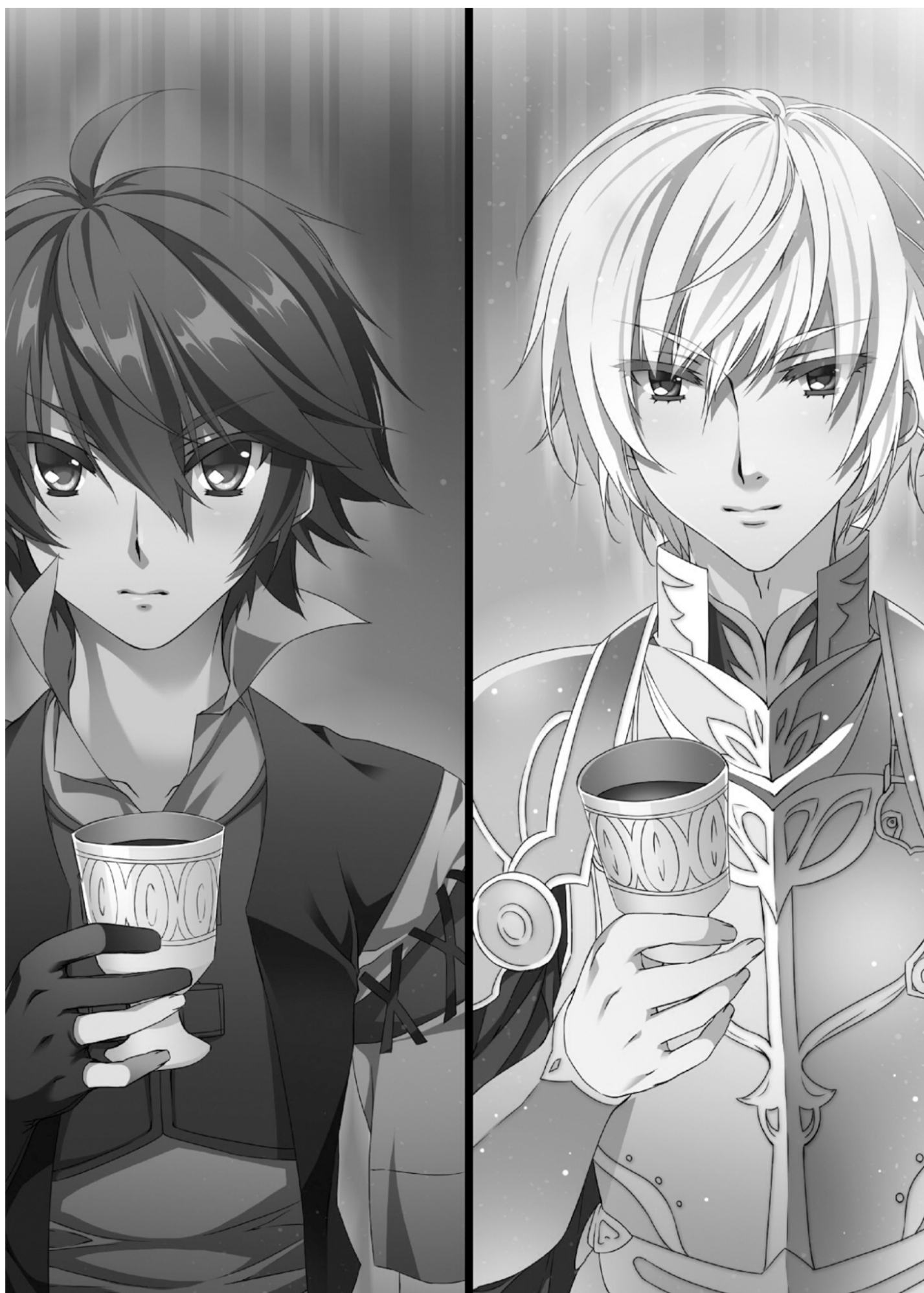
cast down her eyes, she bowed to the two men and left the place.

Tallard sat down at the place and put two silver cups, which he prepared, on the ground. Tigre sat down opposite to him and opened the cork of the wine bottle. He poured wine into the silver cups. Then, both of them respectively pick up a silver cup and lightly knocked them together.

“It’s a toast for your achievements so far and your achievements in the future.”

“Same to you for your victories so far and your victories in the future.”

And they gulped down their wine cups at the same time. It was an action not only to celebrate their reunion, but also to show that they trusted the other party.



“It’s a good wine.”

When Tallard blew out a breath tinged with heat, he erased his smile and revealed a serious expression. Seeing that, Tigre too pulled himself together.

“Let’s settle the main issue before getting drunk. What is your demand?”

“Withdraw from Brune.”

To the direct question, Tigre also returned a clear answer.

“I don’t want to withdraw just like that (free of charge). It costs money just to come here.”

“In the first place, why did you join forces with Sachstein? I heard that Sachstein and Asvarre are mortal enemies though.”

To Tigre’s question, Tallard wonderingly cocked his head in puzzlement.

“Things like friend and foe; it’s something which changes depending on the circumstances of the time, right?”

“What are these circumstances you’re talking about?”

“‘Check by yourself and think’ is what I would like to say, but..... well, it’s fine.”

Saying up to there, Tallard shook his shoulders and laughed.

“We need achievements as soon as possible, you see? In such a time, Sachstein approached us with an offer; asking us to attack Brune.”

“Did you accept their proposal?”

“There was the talk that you’re in Zhcted after all. They also said that, the current Brune not having great Generals, we were free to cut the territories from the north and the west. So, I thought that helping those guys to earn small change would be good.”

Tigre grieved to Tallard’s words. Saying that they were free to cut the land Brune as they liked was like humiliating them.

Although, when considering the total of 70,000 troops, the command ability of Kreuger and Schmidt, the betrayer Melisande and moreover Tallard’s existence, he could hardly say that they were high-sounding words.

Though Tigre defeated Kreuger, it was a close victory. He was not able to defeat Schmidt. On the contrary, it was probably Tigre who would have lost were he to make a wrong move. Were this to happen, Brune would have definitely lost some portion of its territory.

Tigre decided to shift the topic a little.

“Is Asvarre all right? Not even half a year has passed since the civil war ended, right?”

Even in Brune, the scars of the civil war two years ago still remained throughout the country. It should be safe to think that it was also the same for Asvarre. Sure enough, Tallard frowned at Tigre’s question.

“I can’t say that there are no problems. If Sachstein didn’t approach us with that offer, we would probably have devoted ourselves to domestic affairs for several years by now.”

“Then, why?” as he was about to ask as such, Tigre thought of one possibility.

“Don’t tell me, it’s in order to strengthen your position?”

Tigre recalled the words of the messenger that Tallard became a Duke. Although he had enough achievements that no one could refute, he must’ve played a considerably forcible hand in order to be granted the Duke rank just after half a year. In addition, there were Tallard’s current words.

If Sachstein attacked Brune, Asvarre would be done worrying about the threat from the south. And then, it would be possible for them to turn the spare strength generated there to head to Brune.

Moreover, Tallard’s goal was to become King. For him, even the Duke rank was no more than a passage point. Since he aimed much higher, more brilliant achievements should be necessary. If he succeeded in obtaining a territory of Brune, the throne would become quite close for him.

Tigre talked about this thought of his while pouring wine into his silver cup again. Though Tallard said nothing as he only revealed a happy smile, his expression proved the rightness of Tigre’s thought.

When Tigre finished speaking, Tallard asked as if seeming to have been

waiting for it.

“Now then, what do you want from me?”

“My desire is that the Asvarre army withdraws from Brune.”

“Understood. Battle us and lose in a flashy manner. If you become a prisoner, I will give you a warm welcome. It was as such with Zhcted, right?”

As he'd probably heard it from Lim, Tallard said something outrageous with a bright expression. However, he immediately added in a sarcastic tone.

“I'll say it just in case, but I'll decline any half-hearted agreements. If you want to have such a talk no matter what, you'll have to bring even Princess Regin along.”

“Are you meaning that I'm not trustworthy?”

“To put it bluntly, that's right.”

Tallard immediately replied to Tigre who looked puzzled as he knitted his brows. To the youth who opened wide his eyes in amazement, Tallard indifferently explained.

“I heard it from Limalisha-dono. You're currently Earl Vorn governing Alsace, and also the supreme commander of the Moonlight Knights army formed temporarily, right?”

Tigre nodded. At the same time, he noticed that the blond-haired young man's expression became unusually severe. What did he mean by he could not trust him (Tigre)? Tigre did not think that Lim gave an explanation which caused Tallard to misunderstand.

“For example, let see. Let's say that we made an agreement of withdrawing from Brune with 500,000 gold coins as deferred payment. In your current position, this is more likely to be reneged.”

---Reneged? Why would I.....

Not understanding immediately the meaning of Tallard's words, Tigre dropped his gaze to the wine cup. To put it another way, it means that he could not pay out the agreement with his current position.

“Ah!” Tigre almost shouted unintentionally. He understood what the blond-haired young man meant. As Tigre raised his face, he stared at Tallard with a bitter expression.

“This is because when this war is over, the Moonlight Knights army will be dissolved, right?”

Tallard, not smiling, inclined his wine cup as he silently nodded.

Tigre tried to make an agreement with Tallard as the Moonlight Knights army’s supreme commander. Afterwards, when the war would be over, the Moonlight Knights army would be dissolved and Tigre’s position would be naturally lost as well. By that, he could evade the agreement.

Even if Tallard demanded the fulfillment of the agreement to Brune, Brune could just say ‘collect it from Tigre’. However, when the Moonlight Knights army dissolves, Tigre would only be Earl Vorn governing Alsace.

Moreover, Alsace was in a location that was close to Zhcted, so it would be bad to carelessly cause it trouble. Sending soldiers there and pillaging it by force was almost impossible.

Therefore, Tallard told him to bring Princess Regin. More precisely, it would be all right even if it wasn’t Regin. As long as the one he brought along with him was a representative of the Brune Kingdom.

Tigre scratched his darkish red hair. As expected, he didn’t think that Tallard would obediently accept his demand of withdrawing from Brune.

But, he didn’t think that he would be made to recognize the weakness of his position in such a place. Would it have been different if he had wished for a status or territory after the civil war ended in Brune?

---It can’t be helped, I guess.

At the time when he knew that the Asvarre army’s supreme commander was Tallard, one plan was born in Tigre’s mind. It was hardly that great a thing to be called a plan, but he had no choice but to use it.

What he needed was not wisdom. It was the thick-skinned face in both meaning. Tigre inhaled a small breath while putting his silver cup on the ground

and fixed his breathing. He put strength into his stomach.

---Before, Tallard said that.....

He would not hesitate to abandon the people if necessary. The blond-haired young man in front of him had once said so to Tigre. When Tigre thought about how he was going to make a proposal from now on, it pained his heart. But, there was no other way.

“—Tallard.”

Tigre straightened himself and called out to the young Duke of Asvarre. After having slightly moved his eyebrows, Tallard likewise put his silver cup on the ground like Tigre and received the youth's gaze. He asked with a happy smile.

“Do you have some interest topics?”

As Tigre gave a small nod, He spoke as if biting on every single word.

“Would you consider breaking off from Sachstein and joining forces with us?”

“What benefits will I have by doing so?”

“You can live on without fighting me.”

Tigre flatly declared.

Tallard stopped moving for a moment as if he'd heard a foreign language and stared at Tigre with his eyes greatly opened wide. Then, he thoroughly scrutinized the youth's words and burst into laughter when he understood their meaning. He held his sides and shook his shoulders repeatedly. He seemed to be eagerly enduring laughing in a loud voice

Without breaking his posture, Tigre silently waited for him to hold his laughter.

---I guess boasting is fine as well.

Assuming that he fought against Tallard, he did not know whether he would win or not. Rather, he might lose. And yet, he proposed it as if it was the compensation for treachery. It was to the extent that Tigre wanted to laugh at himself thinking “since when did I become such a *very fine* person”.

But, he couldn't come up with any other thing which seemed to be able to

make Tallard move.

Besides, it was not something that would come straight to one's mind.

Tallard said that he took advantage of Sachstein's plan. However, that plan of Sachstein's began to crumble like a sand castle hit by the rain.

Kreuger was killed in action. Melisande also lost her life. Schmidt was still powerful, but Tigre was standing in his way.

And behind Tigre, Zhcted's shadow could be seen.

Tallard should also understand the things to happen from here on.

Before long, Tallard raised his face. Revealing a fearless smile that nobody else could imitate, he stared at Tigre.

"Depending on one's way of thinking, it's a perfect opportunity to fight against you. Knight of the Moonlight. Star Shooter. Were I to beat you, who hold these two nicknames, I might become King with Guinevere as my wife by the end of this year."

To Tallard's seemingly assertive statement, Tigre sighed. Was it no good after all?

But, Tallard slightly laughed and nodded his head.

"Fine. I accept that proposal."

Actually, Tigre's suggestion wasn't that bad an option for Asvarre.

He did not think that there was an error on Sachstein's part. Brune displayed power which exceeded Sachstein's expectations. Especially, this man who came back after gaining the Zhcted army as his ally.

He did not mind Sachstein losing as is, but it was unbearable for him to be rolled up in it. It was necessary for Asvarre to wash off their hands (give up) somewhere. So, why not now?

Tallard lost himself in thought. If he were to fight alongside Sachstein as is, he would be taking on the two countries-Brune and Zhcted as opponents.

The problem was how long would Sachstein hold onto their will of fighting against Brune.

For example, in the case that Sachstein were to reconcile with Brune before Tallard knew of it, Asvarre would have to confront the three countries of Brune, Zhcted and Sachstein at the same time. Though there was not this stupid of a story, if he perused the history of various countries, there were many such precedents.

Of course, Tallard thought about capturing Tigre at this place, cutting off his head, or even sending him to the Sachstein army as a present. In that case, Brune would collapse and Tallard and the Sachstein army would be able to cut Brune's territory as they pleased.

However, there was one concern. It was the existence of the Zhcted kingdom.

Tallard also heard by chance the rumor that Tigrevurmud Vorn has in fact changed sides to Zhcted. If that was the case, were he to murder Tigre or hold him prisoner, Tallard might end up making an enemy out of Zhcted.

The stories that Tallard also heard from Lim during last night became something which reinforced that rumor. Tallard too investigated various things about Zhcted, but there was no foreigner like Tigre who was close to many Vanadis. Lim's stories were all full of persuasiveness and he did not possibly think that they were lies.

Though already mentioned, Sachstein was their (Asvarre) mortal enemy. Tallard did not know when they might point their blade to Asvarre.

Were he to murder Tigre and savor well the juice called Brune, if it resulted in Asvarre being caught in between Zhcted and Sachstein, the name of Tallard would be handed down as one of a fool.

"However, I have some conditions."

Tallard raised two fingers of his right hand and pushed them straight out to Tigre.

"One is to provide us with food and materials. And then, I want traffic (passage) permission in Brune's territory."

Although Tigre was puzzled at the second condition, he immediately understood.

“Don’t tell me that you intend to pass through Brune and attack (invade) Sachstein?”

“Interesting, right?”

Tigre groaned to the words of Tallard who seemed happy from the bottom of his heart. It would certainly be effective. As expected, I’m glad that I don’t have to fight against this man, Tigre thought.

The secret meeting was thus over.



Leonhardt von Schmidt finished his troops’ reorganization in one day and strengthened his determination to absolutely defeat the Moonlight Knights army in the next battle.

But, he no longer had the occasion to fight against the Moonlight Knights army.

When he left the field of Prowirl, deployed his troops in the grassy plain called Monde and confronted/faced the Moonlight Knights army, he noticed it.

That Asvarre has betrayed them.

At this time, the Asvarre army had taken up a position to the Sachstein army’s immediate north. Thinking very normally about it, it should look like both armies were going to attack the Moonlight Knights army which was in front of them.

But, it did not look like that to Schmidt.

If they clashed with the Moonlight Knights army, wouldn’t the Asvarre army go around to their rear as if they were waiting for it? He could only think so.

The experience, which he cultivated in the battlefield for more than twenty years, let an intangible warning resound in his consciousness. Furthermore, the fact that the Moonlight Knights army was settled down too much while having to face a new enemy might have stimulated his intuition. Those who saved his troops the day before yesterday threatened them today.

“—We’re retreating.”

While burning with rage, Schmidt said to his adjutant with a groaning voice. By retreating in this situation, he would probably not avoid the slander of being labeled as a coward.

But, it was better than losing. By thinking so, Schmidt kept his boiling feelings in check.

The Sachstein army retreated. The Moonlight Knights army did not move, the Asvarre army, too.

When they took the time to move about 1 Belsta (about 1 Km), Schmidt told his army about the reason of their retreat. Explaining that the Asvarre army has betrayed them.



It was about eight days later that Schmidt understood that his intuition was right.

It was 5000 Navarre Knight Squadron horsemen and 10,000 Asvarre horsemen who ambushed the Sachstein army, which replenished food and materials while attacking villages and towns and came back to the border using a road different from the one they used to enter.

“Damn, as expected you bastards.....”

It was said that because of too much anger, a part of Schmidt’s brass-colored hair was dyed gray.

While enduring the fierce attack from two countries’ armies, Schmidt returned to Sachstein.

To the report that the Brune invasion has failed, the Sachstein King August shook his shoulders.

The several cards which he played were all rendered useless. The shock which

he received was bigger than anyone else.

August received Schmidt in the audience room. He looked down at Schmidt, who got down on his knee and dejectedly reported, with eyes as to let one feel cruelty. Since Kreuger was no longer in this world, Schmidt was the only one being held responsible for the defeat.

But, August forgave Schmidt. Were he to lose Schmidt, there would be only one remaining person, to whom a large army could be entrusted to, in the current Sachstein. August understood that.

Above all, he had another target/object to turn his anger to.

“—Schmidt.”

Waiting for Schmidt to finish his report, August opened his mouth.

“I will allow you to take a rest for only three days. After that, rebuild your troops as soon as possible.”

The courtiers sitting in a row were surprised at the King’s lenience. August continued his words.

“Your next enemy is Asvarre. Until you take the head of that hateful Tallard, do not think about passing through the royal palace’s doors.”

Schmidt was delighted at having been given an opportunity to clean up his disgrace. As he once again lowered his head on the floor, he swore not to set foot in the royal palace until he has killed Tallard.

Thus, this became the last audience for Schmidt.

For approximately ten years from now, Schmidt did not move from the border between Sachstein and Asvarre and spent his days continually fighting the Asvarre army.

The nickname of “Leonhardt of the Blitz” would be known as the nickname of the brave General who supported Sachstein, which walked the path of destruction as it continued being robbed of its territories by Asvarre, until the end.



It was about when the people had begun to feel the end of spring that the Muozinel army started to move.

“It will be time soon.”

Kreshu gathered his subordinates who were commanding officers and said so. He has long since discovered a path to invading Brune by passing through Agnes. He had caused skirmishes several times with the Olmutz army led by Ludmila Lourie. Though only once, he had soldiers go to Polesia governed by Sofya Obertas.

The Zhcted people would probably no longer suspect it. They should think that Muozinel intended to fight only Zhcted. He used that psychological chance/gap.

“If we achieved the invasion in Brune, first it’s the south. We will take control of the group of port towns there.”

If they controlled the group of port towns of southern Brune, the Muozinel army would be able to contact their own country using the sea route. That would let the soldiers feel relieved. In addition, it would become possible to send what they would steal to their country, and conversely, have their country send food, materials and soldiers.

“Now then, what is Brune doing about at this time?”

Kreshu did not know Brune’s current status. He knew that Sachstein had invaded it and had also sent a messenger to Sachstein, but his information gathering stopped there.

If it turned out to be war, the situation would change countless times in a short period. It was not unusual that the information, which was more precious than gold yesterday, became more worthless than a stone on the roadside today. Moreover, the Muozinel army was in a land far away from Brune

“Now then, it’s the last fight against Ludmila Lourie. Let’s flashily perform this act as best as possible.”

The next day, Kreshu sent the elites, whom he preserved, to the Olmutz army. Mila eagerly endured the fierce attack which could not be compared with the previous skirmishes.

The battle which began since morning continued until the afternoon; the Muozinel army, which was exhausted as expected, greatly retreated like a tide going down when the battle was over.

And then for three days, the Muozinel army did not come in contact with the Olmutz army.

“What are they thinking?”

Mila looked at the Muozinel army, which showed no signs of moving, with suspicious eyes.

“Maybe they are revising their strategy as they were unable to make this fort fall by the attack three days ago.”

Although Mila’s subordinate said so and the blue-haired Vanadis nodded as she agreed, her blue eyes were still tinged with the color of doubt.

It was the next morning that Mila was made to realize Muozinel’s intention.

The Muozinel army disappeared without leaving even one soldier behind. Although they had slipped into the night darkness, a big army of 50,000 performed a movement without the Olmutz army noticing at all.

Mila hurriedly sent reconnaissance units in the four directions north, south, east and west. At the time when the sun went up to its zenith, a report that the Muozinel army was finally found in Agnes arrived to her.

---We were tricked.....!

Mila strongly bit her lips from anger and frustration. Muozinel’s goal was Brune from the beginning, and their offense and defense until several days ago was only a diversion.

--- Tigre.....

The darkish red-haired youth’s figure appeared in the blue-haired Vanadis’

mind. He was fighting against Sachstein and now, had to deal with Muozinel too.

She wanted to rush to him. But, she could not take the same action as two years ago.

This was in part because Mila was ordered by King Victor to standby. There was no guarantee that all the Muozinel troops had went away to the other side of Agnes. As soon as Mila chased them thus making the border of Olmutz short of manpower, there was enough possibility that a detached force of Muozinel would attack there.

Ordering the soldiers to be on alert, Mila put in order the reports in the commander's room.

It was then that the Frozen Wave, which was put beside her, emitted brightness.

Mila stared at her Dragonic Tool in blank amazement. After holding her breath and regaining her calm, she picked up Lavias. The Dragonic Tool's intention was transmitted to Mila through its long handle.

---A demon.....?

Mila knitted her brows and stared at the Frozen Wave. In the northwest from here — in other words, in Brune, Lavias appealed to her that there was a demon.

---What does this mean? Even though it has never informed me of such a thing until now.....

She knew that demons were acting secretly in Zhcted from when all the Vanadises and Tigre gathered on the occasion of the Sun Festival and talked about it. She heard that Baba Yaga and Vodyanoy had showed up in Lebus, and Liza, Elen and Tigre had repelled them.

Was it a problem of distance? Were Sofy in Polesia, Olga in Brest, and Liza in Lebus informed as such by their Dragonic Tools about this time, too?

---There's no time to confirm it.

Mila tightly grasped the spear clad in coldness. She was taught by her mother,

who was a Vanadis, that a Vanadis was also an existence which killed demons. Although, it seemed that her mother had never encountered a demon.

Mila thought that she was probably making an awfully strange face. Even though she has just decided, as a commander and as the lord of Olmutz, not to go to Brune, as a Vanadis, she must go to Brune.

Mila called her right-hand man and told in her usual tone.

“I’m going to Brune. I leave the command here to you.”

“Are you meaning to chase the Muozinel army heading to Brune?”

Her subordinate’s question was certainly natural considering this situation. However, Mila calmly shook her head.

“I’ll be the only one going to Brune. I won’t take anybody along.”

When it came to fighting a demon, an army was unnecessary. On the contrary, they might become a hindrance. To her perplexed subordinate, Mila continued issuing instructions.

“Send messengers respectively to the capital and to Sofy in Polesia. I leave the preparations to you. I’m sorry for being unable to explain the situation to you, but this is something important.”

Mila appealed to her subordinate with a serious expression. Although her subordinate did not immediately reply as he seemed to be perplexed on how he should answer, the trust in his master eventually won over. The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave was not trying to abandon her duty. She was trying to accomplish a different duty.

“As you wish. Please, leave the command of this fort to me. So, Vanadis-sama should be at ease and accomplish her duty.”

“Thank you”

With a smile, Mila expressed her thanks to her subordinate who was her elder.

And then one koku later, Mila, who was ready for her trip, rode a horse and left the fort.

Though it looked like she was chasing the Muozinel army, there was no other shorter way to arrive at Brune, so it could not be helped.

---With a demon as the opponent, I'm in a situation where I would like to borrow Tigre's and Elen's powers, but.....

Currently, there should be Tigre, Elen and Valentina in Brune. Since she did not know whether she could possibly count Valentina as a war potential, she put her on hold for the time being.

She disliked Elen, but the two girls never hesitated to join hands together when necessary. That was precisely why they were able to kill a double-headed dragon in Brune's civil war two years ago.

---I wonder how the battle against Sachstein is going.

The problem was that. If it looked like Tigre and company was having a hard time with Sachstein as their enemy, she would have to think about fighting against the demon by herself.

Dry wind blew on the highway. Mila silently rode her horse.

In a place about one and a half days on foot to the southwest from the capital Nice, there was a grassy plain.

There were approximately 10,000 soldiers there. Their blood lines were various. If there were those who were soldiers serving a certain noble, there were also those who were bandits until just the other day. There were also those who were knights.

They were soldiers gathered by Earl Cotillard. Cotillard, who pledged allegiance to Melisande, gathered soldiers in Nemetacum in order to support her and was waiting for that day.

However, that day never came.

Currently, it was not Cotillard who commanded these 10,000 soldiers. It was a different man.

Cotillard was in front of that man. With an appearance of a gag in his mouth and the bottom from his neck (and his neck down) buried underground. If left

alone as is, there was no doubt that he would become the food of a stray dog.

The man expressed his thanks to Cotillard with a happy voice. It was a man with gray hair.

“You did a good job, Earl. The soldiers that you’ve gathered, I will effectively make use of them.”

The man’s name was Charon Anquetil Greast.

After having stolen “Durandal” from the royal palace and given it to Duke Ganelon, he visited Nemetacum. And then he pretended to be from Melisande’s faction and got in contact with Cotillard.

“Oh yeah, I must also thank Melisande. She was quite useful in everything.”

Ganelon and Greast, who realized Melisande’s ambition, thoroughly used her and her supporters. While Melisande tried to get Regin assassinated, they (Ganelon and co.) stole Durandal. Moreover, they stole the soldiers gathered using her name and funds.

Greast called the captain of each unit and briefly told them.

“We will go north. We will kill Tigrevurmud Vorn who will be totally exhausted from the battle against the Sachstein army. Then, we will make a triumphal return, get rid of Regin and hold real power.”

When the captains left at a quick pace respectively in order to issue instructions to their units, Greast closed his eyes. What appeared in his mind was the figure of the silver-haired Vanadis that he saw two years ago.

“Wait for me, Vanadis. I shall make you mine now.”

As if singing, the gray-haired Marquis muttered so.

As they had repelled the Sachstein army, the Moonlight Knights army which parted from the Asvarre army was heading to the capital. It was said that they came in contact with the so-called Greast army and engaged in battle in a place two days from Nice.

The Moonlight Knights army was defeated.

The supreme commander Tigrevurmud Vorn and Eleonora Viltaria, the commander leading the Zhcted army, went missing within the chaos of the battle.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ A person used by another as a dupe or tool
2. ↑ I think here is the rumor about Tigre who would definitely defeat the Sachstein army and regain peace in Brune like when he suppressed the civil war before
3. ↑ guide to the royal palace, that is
4. ↑ 泳が"されている (meaning let someone swim) is an expression to indicate that you don't care that the said target's action. In some case, it could also mean that whatever the target does, it always is within your prediction, much like the English equivalent of running round in the palm of one's hand. It's actually, for once, a relatively modern expression, it's actually a shortened version of" fish swim in the pond" or in our case "Armand swim in the pond"; more info here:
http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1426332274.
by dragon1412
5. ↑ for those opposing
6. ↑ assuming that Tigre is alive after their plan
7. ↑ several possibilities of what Melisande's aim be
8. ↑ might mean here that these people pledged allegiance to her before when she was living as a prince
9. ↑ as to say that Regin straightened and tighten herself too
10. ↑ it is said here "imagine" because he weren't facing the Princess, thus couldn't see her pupils
11. ↑ N representing a number here
12. ↑ meaning that people won't go out in groups at this time if they were only suspicious so implying they're dangerous/a threat. By dualxblades
13. ↑ meaning just in case the enemy wasn't dead
14. ↑ meaning here that she dealt with him quite tolerantly
15. ↑ people of Melisande's faction

16. ↑ due to the poison
17. ↑ they advanced while touching the wall so as not to fall since there wasn't that much light
18. ↑ wind bringing him close the balcony
19. ↑ 'they' refers to the people who will doubt the announcement
20. ↑ this basically means that the other Sachstein army would attack immediately if they learned that one part of the forces of the Navarre Fort goes after their comrades who invaded
21. ↑ meaning pillaging
22. ↑ Blitz is a German word meaning lightning
23. ↑ them meaning the first wave that charged at the Sachstein army
24. ↑ it refers to the situations Tigre and Elen has been in so far/currently